NATION

UNICEF report says 1 in 4 children suffers food poverty

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Govt buys onion for buffer stock, retail rates may ease

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Euro 2024: Schick becomes all-time top scorer for the Czechs

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Archery World Cup: Indian women grab 3 golds

ANTALYA, 22 JUNE

The Indian compound women's archery team of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Aditi Swami and Parneet Kaur continued their imperious form this season, securing a hat-trick of World Cup gold medals with a win over Estonia, even as Priyansh settled for a silver here on Saturday.

Priyansh narrowly lost the men's final to world number one Mike Schloesser. Entering the final as the top-seeded team, the women's trio displayed their prowess by defeating Estonia's Lisell Jaatma, Meeri-Marita Paas, and Maris Tetsmann 232-229 in a one-sided final of the stage 3 event. The women's compound team has been invincible this season, winning all three World Cup stages. They previously secured gold at stage 1 in Shanghai and stage 2 in Yecheon in April and May respectively, making them unbeaten champions in the 2024 World Cup series. Later in the day, rising compound archer Priyansh failed to defeat Dutch heavyweight Schloesser for a second time this season and settled for a runner-up finish. Priyansh, who showed flawless shooting to enter the final, dropped a point in the opening set and could not overcome the deficit as Schloesser shot a series of 10s to clinch the match 149-148. It was in the final set that the Dutch archer dropped a point as Priyansh needed a perfect 30 score to clinch the gold, but the Indian missed one point to finish second best. In the semi-final, the 21-year-old landed all his 15 arrows in the perfect-10 ring to knock out World No. 2 Mathias Fullerton by one point, thus also exacting his defeat of the last World Cup. At the stage 2 World Cup in Yecheon last month, the Danish archer had eliminated Priyansh in the pre-quarters in a tight shoot-off finish.

For Priyansh, this was his second World Cup silver. At the season-opening World Cup in Shanghai in April this year, Priyansh had lost to World No. 8 Nico Wiener of Austria 147-150 in the final. *—PTI*

The women's compound team has been invincible this season, winning all three World Cup stages **PHOTO: PTI**

Petrol, diesel under GST as Council tweaks tax rates

Council bats for biometric-based authentication, boosts rlys

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

GST Council on Saturday decided to tweak tax rates on items, including accommodation services for students and solar cookers. It also took a host of taxpayer-friendly measures including waiver of interest and penalty for demand notices issued in the first three years of GST rollout.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the intention of the Central government has always been to bring petrol and diesel under GST, and it is now up to the states to come together and decide on the rate. Briefing reporters after the 53rd GST Council meeting, Sitharaman said the Council has recommended to roll-out the biometric-based Aadhaar authentication of registration applicants on pan-India basis in a phased manner.

To reduce litigation, the Council decided to fix a monetary limit for tax officers to file appeals before the GST Appellate Tribunal, High Court and Supreme Court at Rs 20 lakh, Rs 1 crore and Rs 2 crore, respectively.

PHOTO: PTI

It also recommended reduction of the quantum of pre-deposit required to be paid by taxpayers for filing of appeals under Goods and Services Tax (GST). The maximum amount of pre-deposit for filing appeal with the appellate authority has been reduced from Rs 25 crore CGST and SGST each to Rs 20 crores CGST and SGST each. It recommended to exempt Accommodation Services of up to Rs 20,000 per person per month from GST. The Council also decided to refer the standing committee's recommendation to exempt GST on fertiliser and cut rates on raw materials to the GoM on rate rationalisation.

Currently, GST is levied at 5 per cent on fertilisers, while its raw materials like sulphuric acid and ammonia face 18 per cent tax. Also the Tax Collected at Source (TCS) rate for e-commerce suppliers has been cut from present 1 per cent to 0.5 per cent. Besides, services provided by Indian Railways to the general public, namely, sale of platform tickets, facility of retiring rooms/waiting rooms, cloak room services and battery-operated car services as well as intra-railway transactions would be exempt from GST. GST Council has prescribed a uniform rate of 12 per cent on all milk cans meaning steel, iron, aluminum which are irrespective of the use. All types of Sprinklers, including fire water sprinklers, will attract 12 per cent GST. Solar Cookers, whether it has a single or dual energy source, will attract a 12 per cent tax. *—PTI*

What's pricey and what's cheaper?

Expensive

- Milk cans
- Sprinklers including fire water sprinklers
- Solar cookers

CHEAPER

- Railway platform tickets of retiring rooms, waiting rooms, cloak-room facilities
- Battery vehicles and carton boxes
- Hostels outside educational institutions charging to Rs 20,000 per month are exempted.

NEET & NET DEBACLE

NTA head sacked; ex-ISRO chief to lead exam panel

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Amid protest in the country, the Centre has removed the National Testing Agency (NTA) Chief from the post. Subodh Kumar Singh, who was NTA Director General, has been replaced by retired Indian Administration Service (IAS) officer Pradeep Singh Kharola

Also the Education Ministry on Saturday notified a seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations through the National Testing Agency (NTA).

Meanwhile, NEET-PG scheduled for Sunday has been postponed and fresh dates will be announced soon, the Health Ministry said.

NTA, which is under fire over the lapses in the conduct of NEET and UGC-NET, is gearing up to conduct on Sunday a retest for the medical entrance exam for 1,563 candidates who were earlier awarded grace marks to make up for the loss of time at six centres.

While medical NEET is under scanner over several irregularities, including alleged leaks, the UGC-NET was cancelled a day after it was conducted as the ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam was compromised.

The panel will make recommendations on reforms in the mechanism of the examination process, improvement in data security protocols and the structure and functioning of the NTA. It is supposed to submit its report within two months.

"The panel will analyse the end-to-end examination process and suggest measures to improve efficiency of the system and to forestall any possible breach. It will conduct a thorough review of the Standard Operating Procedures and protocols of the NTA, and suggest measures to strengthen these procedures," the Ministry said. The committee has also been tasked with examining the existing security protocols related to the setting of the papers and other processes for different examinations and making recommendations to enhance the robustness of the system. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan **PHOTO: X/@RADHAKR272**

10-yrs jail, ₹1 cr fine for exam malpractice

The Centre operationalised a stringent law that aims to curb malpractices and irregularities in competitive examinations and entails provisions for a maximum jail term of 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 1 crore for offenders. Nearly four months after President Droupadi Murmu gave assent to The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, the Personnel Ministry on Friday night issued a notification, saying the provisions of the law will come into force from 21 June. The move assumes significance amid a raging row over UGC-NET, 2024, exam's question paper leak.

Court orders interim gag against 47 media outlets

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

Karnataka High Court has issued an injunction order against 47 media outlets, including newspapers and television channels, restraining them from publishing, telecasting, or transmitting any unauthenticated information or opinion that could potentially lower the image of a plaintiff. This temporary measure will remain in place until the next hearing scheduled for 6 August, 2024. The plaintiff, whose identity remains undisclosed, sought the court's intervention to prevent what they allege is the dissemination of defamatory content by these media organisations.

| The court has mandated compliance with Rule 3(a) of Code of Civil Procedure (CPC), which necessitates the plaintiff to serve a notice to the defendants, ensuring transparency and due process. Each of these media outlets has been issued a suit summons and temporary injunction (TI) order, which they must adhere to immediately. Defendant No 1, whose identity is yet to be revealed, has been served a suit summons returnable by 6 August, 2024. The court has said if the plaintiff fails to furnish sufficient process fees, plaints, and IA copies within three working days from the issuance of the order, the interim injunction will be automatically vacated. *—Salar News*

ANANDA MARGA PONTIFF KILLED IN KOLAR OVER LAND DISPUTE, 3 HELD

RANGANATH KRISHNASWAMY, KOLAR, 22 JUNE

Ananda Marga group pontiff Acharya Chinmayananda was murdered in Kolar on Saturday over land dispute related to educational institutions run by Ananda Margis. Malur police have arrested three people for allegedly killing the 65-year-old pontiff from Kolkata.

This murder took place at 6 am on Saturday when Chinmayananda was attacked by a group at his ashram at Santhehalli in Malur taluk. Those arrested are Arun Kumar, Dharma Prananda Swamiji and Praneshwarananda and police is on the lookout for other culprits. Chinmayananda was allegedly dragged to a nearby cottage and assaulted, causing him grievous injuries. The dispute began in 2010 when the Head office of Ananda Marga group transferred Acharya Animeshananda Avadooth (Principal) and appointed Archargya Dharma Prananda Avadooth in his place. Following this, groupism started in the institutions and there was a split among the administrators, staff and the students. Many counter complaints were lodged with police and courts. Villagers who found Kolar Superintendent of Police M Narayan said there was a long dispute between two groups of the mutt over the ownership of the land and also over the administration of the Diploma College run by Ananda Marga group at Santhehalli.

—Salar News

FIGHT FOR WATER, WITH WATER

Delhi Police on Saturday uses water cannon to disperse BJP workers protesting against AAP government over water shortage in the national capital **PHOTO: PTI**

B'LURU TURF CLUB'S SAGA

HC bans racing, betting at BTC

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

Karnataka High Court has put a temporary halt on horse racing and betting activities at the Bangalore Turf Club following a series of legal battles. The dispute arose when the State government denied the turf club's application to conduct races between June and August citing the on-going criminal proceedings related to alleged Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion. However, in response, the turf club, along with other associations representing horse owners, jockeys, trainers, and punters, challenged the government's decision in court.

Initially, the petitions contested the government's delay in processing the license applications. However, after an official rejection, the arguments shifted focus. On 18 June, a single-judge bench issued a temporary order allowing races to proceed while the legal case continued. But, the initial relief was short-lived. On 22 June, a higher court division bench intervened, supporting State government's appeal. The bench acknowledged the State's strong grounds for refusing the license due to the criminal case. Following this, they imposed a stay on all racing activities. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Bangalore Turf club challenged the govt's decision in court **PHOTO: PTI**

SURAJ REVANNA BOOKED ON ASSAULT CHARGES

HASSAN, 22 JUNE

Janata Dal (S) MLC Suraj Revanna was booked on charges of sexually assaulting a 28-year-old man at his farmhouse in Hassan district.

Soon after Holenarasipura police filed an FIR, Revanna's close associate Shiva Kumar filed a counter-complaint against the complainant accusing him of blackmailing for Rs 5 crore. On Saturday, Revanna came to the CEN police station and submitted an audio clip in which the complainant demanded money from him to hush up the case.

Police said Suraj was booked under IPC sections 377, 342 and 34 and was being interrogated. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

India keen on Teesta river's conservation

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina on Saturday discussed about sending an Indian team to Bangladesh for a mega project to conserve Teesta River. A comprehensive trade pact and boosting defence ties were among major outcomes of talks between them.

The decision on Teesta river assumes significance as China was keenly eyeing the estimated USD 1 billion project notwithstanding reservations by New Delhi. Hasina may visit China next month.

India and Bangladesh signed 10 agreements providing for bolstering ties in a range of critical areas such as digital domain, maritime sphere, blue economy, railways, space, green technology, health and medicine. Modi told media both sides agreed to start negotiations on a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. "Fifty-four shared rivers connect India and Bangladesh. We have been cooperating on flood management, early warning, drinking water projects. We have decided to start negotiations at the technical level for the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty," he said. Modi said India will launch an e-medical visa facility for people from Bangladesh coming to India for medical treatment. The issue of Rohingya refugees and boosting cooperation under Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) also figured in the talks. A passenger train between Kolkata and Rajshahi will commence service soon. A bus service between Kolkata and Chittagong will be rolled out. *—PTI*

Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina with Indian counterpart Narendra Modi during ceremonial reception, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan **PHOTO: PTI**

Darshan threatening witnesses: Cops

Darshan is remanded to judicial custody till 4 July in his fan's murder case

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

A complaint has been lodged against the aides of Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, who was arrested along with 16 others in Renukaswamy murder, for threatening the eye-witnesses in the case, police said in its remand note presented in a court here on Saturday.

The court on Saturday remanded Darshan to judicial custody in till 4 July

His four alleged accomplices too were sent to judicial custody.

Meanwhile, police have decided to ask the Income Tax department to join the investigation into case in view of the alleged involvement of about Rs 78 lakh in the execution of the crime.

After producing Darshan and three others before the court, the police stated that they were not making the names of the eyewitnesses' public citing their safety.

"Actress Pavithra Gowda, Darshan and other accused involved in the case have been 'creating obstacles continuously' in the investigation of the case."

In the court, police charged all the accused with trying to destroy the material evidences.

The police also told the court that all the accused contacted each other through web application and destroyed data. Hence, they sought the permission of the court to get the fresh SIM card of the accused.

Regarding Renukaswamy's phone, police said, "The court is requested to grant permission to apply for Renukaswamy's SIM card from the service provider to 're-access' the data in the mobile phone, which the accused had thrown in the Sumanahalli stormwater drain to destroy the data."

Opposing bail to the accused, the police said the actor could destroy the evidences for being influential, rich and having a large fan base.

Renukaswamy, a fan of Darshan, was abducted from Chitradurga on 8 June and was brutally tortured to death allegedly by the 47-year-old actor and his gang for sending messages to Pavithra. —*PTI*

After producing Darshan and three others before the court, the police stated that they were not making the names of the eyewitnesses' public citing their safety **PHOTO: SALAR**

> The police said that all the accused contacted each other through web application and destroyed data. Hence, they seeked permission to get the fresh SIM card of the accused

'FALSE CASE'

2 booked for blackmailing Prajwal's brother

HOLENARASIPURA, 22 JUNE

A JD(S) worker and his kin were booked for allegedly trying to extort money from party MLC Suraj Revanna by threatening to lodge a false case of sexual assault against him, police said.

The complaint was filed by Suraj's close aide Shivakumar on Friday based on which an FIR was registered against Chethan KS and his brother-in-law.

Chethan too lodged a police complaint on Friday, accusing Revanna of sexually assaulting him.

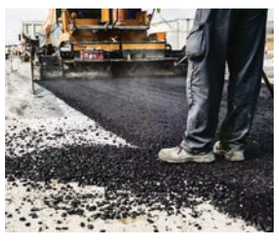
Suraj is the son of Holenarasipura MLA HD Revanna and the elder brother of former Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna who is in police custody for allegedly sexually assaulting several women.

In the complaint, Shivakumar alleged that Chethan became his friend and started working for the 'Suraj Revanna Brigade'.

Recently, Chethan asked for money to meet family expenses but when Shivakumar refused, the accused threatened to lodge a police complaint, accusing Suraj of sexually assaulting him.

Shivakumar claimed that Chethan demanded Rs 5 crore and later it was reduced to Rs 2 crore.

Based on the complaint, police have registered a case under IPC sections 384 (extortion), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 34 (involvement of others in the conspiracy) against Chethan and his brother-in-law. —*PTI*



Corruption over road construction funds, says BJP

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 22 JUNE

BJP has raised allegations of corruption within the Chamarajanagar Municipal Council regarding the funds allocated for a concrete road project. An amount of Rs 8 crore designated for the construction of a two-kilometre concrete road has been fully expended, yet only one kilometre of the road has been completed. BJP leader Nijgunaraju has raised serious concerns, indicating that an additional Rs 3.8 crore has been released for the same road work, alleging mismanagement and misuse of public funds. The funds were sanctioned under a special grant from the Chief Minister in 2017. It was intended for a project that included the installation of a concrete road and street lights from the DYS office to Satyamangala Circle. Responding to these allegations, Chamarajanagar Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shilpa Nag acknowledged irregularities in the project. She mentioned that a special panel has been tasked with investigating the matter and is expected to submit a report by June. She said, "If it is proved that the funds have been misused, strict action will be taken against those involved. If a contractor is found to be at fault, they will be blacklisted as well." —*Salar News*

Computer training empowers prison inmates

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 22 JUNE

A one-of-a-kind programme providing computer education training to prison inmates has achieved remarkable success in Chamarajanagar. The initiative equips undertrial prisoners in Chamarajanagar District Jail with skills to support their post-release livelihood. It is supported by Infosys and Rotary Club Panchsheel Mysuru. The training program was conducted within the prison itself, with 10 computers and printers. A total of 38 remand prisoners registered, and seven inmates completed the courses, receiving certification from Infosys. Instructors from IIHT Academy provided comprehensive training in Microsoft Office, computer fundamentals, and soft skills. "Everyone's contribution is invaluable in building the country," said District Collector Shilpanag. "No one is superior or inferior in society," Shilpanag said, adding, "Everyone should have equal opportunities. After the prisoners are released, they should live a good life with confidence and contribute to society. Those who are trained can open their own cyber centres and service centres, becoming role models." —*Salar News*

RETURN FROM HAJJ

Hajj pilgrims arrive at Kempegowda International Airport from Jeddah in Bengaluru on Saturday. Pilgrims who left for Hajj in the first flight came back in the first flight after their journey for more than a month **PHOTO: SALAR**

HDK DIRECTS OFFICIALS TO REVIVE HMT

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

Union Minister of Heavy Industries and Steel HD Kumaraswamy on Saturday directed the officials to revive the Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT).

He gave the direction at a meeting with the top officials of HMT here .

During the meeting, the Minister had discussions with the company's Chairman and Managing Director Rajesh Kohli, along with other senior officials.

"Kumaraswamy reviewed details on turnover, net profit, and other key metrics. He also discussed the financial, production, and operational conditions of the company with the officials," a statement issued by the minister's office said.

"The once-glorious HMT is currently facing significant challenges. The Minister emphasised the need to strengthen the company and instructed Rajesh Kohli to submit a proposal to the central government for necessary support," it added.

Kumaraswamy said the revival of HMT is aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative

"The minister encouraged the officials to adopt this vision and lead the recovery efforts, assuring them of central government assistance," the statement said. —*PTI*

Panel approves 64 industrial projects worth over Rs 3,500 cr

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

The State-Level Single Window Clearance Committee (SLSWCC) headed by Minister MB Patil on Friday approved 64 projects worth Rs 3,587.67 crore, according to an official statement.

These projects are projected to generate employment for approximately 13,896 people across the state, the release by the Minister's office said.

Among the notable approvals by the committee are proposals from International Battery Company India Private Limited and River Mobility Private Limited, which plan to invest Rs 390 crore and Rs 306.9 crore.

Patil, the Minister for Large, Medium Industries, and Infrastructure Development, said the SLSWCC approved 13 major large and medium projects with capital investments exceeding Rs 50 crore, totalling Rs 2,046.39 crore and expected to create around 7,199 jobs.

Additionally, 47 new projects with investments ranging from Rs 15 crore to Rs 50 crore were approved, totalling Rs 1,058.55 crore, which would generate approximately 6,547 jobs. —*PTI*

MINORITIES IN FOCUS

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan takes part in a symposium organised by All India Milli Council, Karnataka Chapter, on the topic of declining representation of Muslims in the Lok Sabha. KPCC Vice President Mohammed Obaidulla Sharif, Maulana Mustafa Rifai, Syed Shafiulla, Maulana Abdul Gafoor Baqvi, Maulana Naushad Alam, Syed Shahid Ahmed and others were present **PHOTO: SALAR**

LEGAL CHALLENGES FACED BY BANGALORE TURF CLUB

12 JAN: Central Crime Branch (CCB) raid at BTC, 66 bookies arrested, Rs. 3.47 crore seized.

13 JAN: Bookies released on station bail; BTC distances itself from the issue.

20 JAN: Karnataka GST department raid BTC, revealing tax evasion.

5 FEB: BTC files writ with HC challenging raids.

18 FEB: High Court begins hearings.

30 MARCH: HC temporarily stays BTC's license suspension, allowing operations.

1 APRIL: Government suspends BTC's license.

10 APRIL: BTC files appeal challenging suspension.

15 APRIL: HC refuses to quash FIR against 26 bookmakers.

20 MAY: HC orders BTC's license renewal review by 6 June.

6 JUNE: Govt rejects BTC's license renewal.

8 JUNE: BTC files revised petition in HC, seeks permission to continue operations.

20 JUNE: HC hears arguments, suggests regulatory changes to prevent irregulairites. —*Salar News*

94 grab jobs in Slovakia with govt's help

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

In a move that opens doors to international job opportunities, Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (KSDC) has begun facilitating placements for youth from the State. Recently, a first batch of 94 candidates, including ITI and diploma holders, departed for assembly line operator positions in Slovakia.

This initiative, spearheaded by Sharan Prakash Patil, the Skill Development, Livelihood & Medical Education Minister, is a result of a collaborative effort between the KSDC and Ministry of External Affairs. Recognising Slovakia's demand for skilled workers, Patil secured an agreement to send over 2,500 assembly line operators.

KSDC provided the youth with relevant skill training free of charge, in collaboration with the Toyota Kirloskar unit in Bidadi. Additionally, KSDC assisted with visa processing, document verification, and even arranged food and accommodation. Recognising the financial constraints of many candidates, Patil ensured the department covered the training costs, which would have otherwise been a significant burden.

The first two batches of 94 candidates have already departed for Slovakia, with more scheduled to leave in the coming days. At a send-off ceremony, Patil distributed flight tickets and announced a promising monthly salary of approximately Rs 86,000.

KSDC is actively exploring opportunities in other countries as well. KSDC MD M Kanagavalli highlighted their efforts to connect skilled technicians and blue-collar workers with job demands in Australia, Japan, Germany, and Finland. —*Salar News*

ELECTROCUTED & WOUNDED

Leopard, tiger found dead in Chamarajanagar

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 22 JUNE

A female leopard, estimated to be around 8 to 10 years old, died due to electrocution at Nenekatte village of Gundlupet taluk in Chamarajanagar district on Saturday.

The leopard was electrocuted after coming into contact with a neem tree that was connected to a farm's pump set. Farmers discovered the carcass and informed the forest officers from the Gundlupet buffer zone.

The forest officers conducted a post-mortem of the leopard and cremated it.

In a separate incident, a tiger cub, estimated to be around 5 to 6 years old, was found dead near Gundal reservoir in Kollegala taluk in Chamarajanagar district.

The leopard was electrocuted after coming into contact with a neem tree that was connected to a farm's pump set **PHOTO: SALAR**

This area is under the purview of Operation Cheetah, aimed at protecting and managing the local cheetah population.

> The tiger appeared to have sustained a deep shoulder wound, likely from a territorial fight with another tiger. Farmers discovered the carcass and informed the forest officers from Gundlupet buffer zone

The tiger appeared to have sustained a deep shoulder wound, likely from a territorial fight with another tiger. Deep J Contractor, DCF of Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, said the tiger's claws and teeth have been preserved. —*Salar News*

EMINENT KANNADA LITTERATEUR KAMALA HAMPANA NO MORE

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

Eminent Kannada literatteur 'Nadoja' Kamala Hampana died at her Rajaji Nagar residence on Saturday due to age-related diseases. Hampana was 88.

She was born on 28 October, 1935, in Devanahalli near Bengaluru. She started her career as a teacher and gradually made a name in the field of literature. She was an academician, researcher, and writer too.

She had a career spanning 60 years and a published over 60 books in Kannada across different genres. She also authored two books in English, 'Attimabbe and Chalukyas' and 'Jainism and other essays'.

Hampana had won Karnataka Sahitya Aademy Award, Daana Chintamani Attimabbe Award and the Rajyotsava award from the Karnataka Government. As per the veteran's wish, her body will be donated to Ramaiah medical college for medical research.

Many prominent officials including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed their condolences to the deceased writer. —*PTI/ Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Ayyannapatrudu elected Andhra Assembly Speaker

AMARAVATI, 22 JUNE

TDP's Narsipatnam MLA C Ayyannapatrudu was elected unanimously as the Speaker of the 16th Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Saturday. Addressing the Assembly, Pro-tem Speaker and TDP's Rajahmundry Rural MLA G Butchaiah Chowdary said that Janasena Chief Pawan Kalyan, TDP General Secretary Nara Lokesh and BJP's Staya Kumar Yadava made three proposals on behalf of Ayyannapatrudu for Speaker's post. The polls were a formality as no one else filed nomination.—*PTI*

Case filed after 720 voter cards found discarded in Thane

THANE, 22 JUNE

Police have registered a case after 720 voter ID cards were found discarded in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Saturday. Passersby saw the voter cards strewn on the ground near Pisavli Gate on the Shil-Kalyan road on Thursday, he said. Based on a complaint by election officials, the Manpada police in the Dombivli area registered a case on Friday for theft and other charges under the IPC, and the Representation of the People Act, he said. A probe is underway to ascertain from where the voter ID cards were stolen and those behind the crime, the official added.—*PTI*

Bibhav Kumar to be in judicial custody till 6 July

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

A court here on Saturday extended till July 6 the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar. Kumar is accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on 13 May at the Chief Minister's official residence. Kumar was produced through video conferencing before Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal who extended his judicial custody till 6 July. Kumar was arrested on 18 May. He was sent to police custody for five days the same day by a magisterial court, which observed that his anticipatory bail plea had become infructuous because of his arrest. On 24 May, he was sent to four days judicial custody, following which he was again remanded in police custody for three days. An FIR was registered against Kumar on 16 May under various Indian Penal Code provisions, including those related to criminal intimidation, assault or criminal force on a woman with the intent to disrobe and attempt to commit culpable homicide.—*PTI*

BRS men booked for protest outside Reddy's house

HYDERABAD, 22 JUNE

A case has been registered against 12 Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders for staging a protest in front of the residence of former Assembly Speaker Pocharam Srinivas Reddy who swiched over to the Congress party police said. The case has been registered at the Banjara Hills police station under Sections 353 and 440 of the Indian Penal Code. Assistant Commissioner of Police, Banjara Hills said that the leaders have been sent to remand."We have registered a case against 12 people under sections 353 and 440. They have been remanded" the ACP told reporters on Friday. Pocharam Srinivas Reddy along with his son, Bhaskar Reddy, joined the Congress party on 21 June. "Pocharam Srinivas Reddy and his son Bhaskar Reddy joined the Congress. The Chief Minister Revanth Reddy invited them into the party by wearing a scarf," the Telangana Congress posted on X.—*ANI*

No paper leak in CSIR-NET: Union min

Min said that NTA top brass is under scanner

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

The "top leadership" of the National Testing Agency(NTA) is under the scanner over alleged irregularities in competitive exams NEET and NET, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Saturday even as he denied any paper leak in the CSIR-UGC NET, which was postponed a day back.

The minister said he is the custodian of students' interests and has to take that into account before taking any step. Amid a raging row over irregularities in the medical entrance exam NEET, Pradhan had said earlier this week that he cannot jeopardise the careers of the lakhs of candidates who cleared the exam rightfully.

The June edition of the Joint Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and UGC-NET was postponed on Friday night. The Joint CSIR-UGC-NET is a test conducted to determine eligibility for junior research fellowship and assistant professor and admission to PhD in science courses. "There was no leak in CSIR-UGC NET, it was postponed because of logistic issues. There is also a retest of 1,563 NEET candidates tomorrow. For smooth conduct of the exam everywhere, the decision was taken," Pradhan told reporters.

"I have already said there has been an institutional failure. I have taken responsibility." he added. —*PTI*

The Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said he is the custodian of students' interests PHOTO: PTI

Cong dubs new laws against paper leak as 'damage control'

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

The Centre's decision now to implement a law to prevent the use of unfair means in competitive examinations after several "scams" have taken place, including in the NEET-UG and the UGC-NET tests, is "damage control", Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claimed on Saturday.

This law was needed but it deals with question paper leaks and other irregularities after they have occurred, he claimed on X.

Several Opposition political parties and student associations, including the Congress, have held protests across the country over alleged irregularities in medical entrance exam NEET-UG and the UGC-NET.

Amid the raging row over the issue, the Centre on Friday operationalised the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, that aims to curb malpractices and irregularities in competitive examinations and entails provisions for a maximum jail term of 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 1 crore for offenders.

The Bill received the President's assent on 13 February, but was enforced only on Friday, Ramesh, the Congress' General Secretary communications, said. —*PTI*

NEET LEAK: COPS MULL NARCO TEST, BRAIN MAPPING OF ACCUSED

PATNA, 22 JUNE

The Economic Offences Unit of Bihar Police has obtained NEET reference question papers to compare these with documents recovered during a search operation last month from a flat here and is also exploring the "possibility of conducting narco analysis and brain mapping tests" of accused in the case, sources said on Saturday.

They also indicated that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) might investigate the money laundering aspect of the alleged irregularities in the medical entrance examination -the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) or NEET, conducted by the National Testing Agency in May.

The EOU sleuths discussed certain factual aspects of the case based on their investigation with the senior officials of the Union Education Ministry and other related wings in Delhi on Saturday, sources said.

Bihar Police also detained six people from Jharkhand's Deoghar district in connection with the case.

The EOU last month arrested 13 people, including prime suspect Sikandar Yadavendu, in connection with the alleged paper leak in the NEET-UG 2024 exam conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA). —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

AHEAD OF FIRST SESSION

Govt, Opposition spar on pro-tem LS Speaker issue

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Ahead of the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, the NDA government and INDIA bloc sparred on the issue of Pro-tem Speaker with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju accusing the Congress of resorting to lies and the opposition threatening to refuse to join the panel of chairpersons in the House.

President Droupadi Murmu had appointed BJP leader and seven-term member Bhartruhari Mahtab as the Pro-tem Speaker of the Lok Sabha, who is tasked with administering the oath and affirmation to the newly-elected members of the lower house and preside over the election of the Speaker.

The President had also named five senior members - K Suresh (Congress), TR Baalu (DMK), Radha Mohan Singh and Faggan Singh Kulaste (both BJP) and Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC) to assist Mahtab in the process that will take place over the first three days of the Lok Sabha Session commencing on 24 June.

Congress had alleged that the government has violated procedures and conventions and ignored the right of eight-term member Suresh to the post of the pro-tem Speaker, a claim dismissed as "misleading" by Rijiju.

On Saturday, Opposition sources said Suresh, Baalu and Bandyopadhyay may not join the panel of chairpersons to assist pro-tem Speaker Mahtab in administering the oath to the newly elected members of the Lok Sabha.

Rijiju had asserted that Mahtab was the senior-most in the House as he was elected for seven uninterrupted terms to the Lok Sabha, while Suresh, though a eight-term member, was not a member in 1998 and 2004.

Suresh had said his claim to the post of pro-tem speaker was overlooked as he belonged to the Dalit community, remarks that were scoffed at by Rijiju. —*PTI*

Kiren Rijiju PHOTO: PTI

- Rijiju had asserted that Mahtab was the senior-most in the House as he was elected for seven uninterrupted terms to the Lok Sabha, while Suresh, though a eight-term member, was not a member in 1998 and 2004

YSRCP office demolished despite court orders: Jagan

AMARAVATI, 22 JUNE

AYSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Saturday said the Chandrababu Naidu-led NDA state government has demolished the under construction central office of the Opposition party at Tadepalli in Guntur district.

Reddy alleged that the demolition was carried out disregarding high court orders.

"Chandrababu took vendetta politics to the next level. Like a dictator, he got YSRCP's central office demolished with excavators and bulldozers, which was almost complete," said Reddy on X. Reacting to it, TDP said that the central party office was demolished based on a complaint lodged by a TDP leader that it was being allegedly built illegally on Irrigation Department land, said the party on Saturday.

The complaint was lodged with the commissioners of the Capital Region Development Authority and Mangalagiri Tadepalli Municipal Corporation that the Opposition party office was being built illegally, a TDP release said. —*PTI*

YSRCP office being demolished in Guntur district on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

'VIKSIT BHARAT BY 2047'

Shah launches programme to fast-track immigration services

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a special programme under which the immigration process of pre-verified Indian nationals and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders will be fast-tracked, an official said.

The Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP) is a "visionary initiative" by the government, thoughtfully designed for Indian nationals and OCI cardholders, the official said.

Eligible individuals will need to apply online and submit their biometrics (fingerprint and facial image) along with other required information as specified in the application form.

The FTI registration will be valid for a maximum of five years or until the validity of the passport, whichever comes first, he said.

Approved applications would receive a message to schedule an appointment to provide their biometrics details. Applicants may provide their biometrics at designated international airports in India or the nearest Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) according to the prior appointment schedule.

Biometrics is compulsory for the completion of the application processing, the official said.

The applicants may ensure a minimum passport validity of at least six months while applying for the FTI-TTP. The membership of programmer will be co-terminus with passport validity, he said.

The applicant needs to provide the current residential address to avoid the rejection of the application, another official said. The programme is one of the key agendas set for "Viksit Bharat by 2047" and reflects the Narendra Modi government's commitment to enhance travel convenience and efficiency for everyone, he said. Incorrect information, concealing any material facts in the application form shall make the application liable for rejection. The FTI-TTP aims to revolutionise people's travel experience, making it faster, easier, and more secure, he added. —*PTI*

Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

ATISHI'S FAST ENTERS 2ND DAY, BJP CALLS IT A SHAM

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Delhi Water Minister Atishi continued her indefinite fast, which enters the second day on Saturday, over the water crisis in the national capital.

The minister sat on indefinite fast on Friday, alleging that Haryana was not releasing Delhi's rightful share of water in Yamuna.

Meanwhile, a group of protesters on Saturday raised slogans and waved placards at the venue of Delhi Water Minister Atishi's indefinite hunger strike against the water crisis in the city, with AAP alleging BJP caused the disruption. BJP hit back terming the hunger strike a political drama and claimed the protesters were civil defence volunteers.

Taking a dig at Atishi, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said it was a "Kejriwal model" of hunger strike in which a "Satyagrahi" can even go home and eat and drink. —*PTI*

OBC activists end fast post meeting mins

JALNA, 22 JUNE

Activists Laxman Hake and Navnath Waghmare on Saturday ended their hunger strike over the demand that OBC quota should not be diluted after meeting a Maharashtra government delegation.

The duo had launched the indefinite fast on 13 June as a counter to Maratha activist Manoj Jarange's demand that Marathas should get reservation in the Other Backward Class (OBC) category.

"We are temporarily suspending our protest. If our demands are not met, we will resume it," Hake told reporters at Wadigodri village in Jalna district of central Maharashtra after meeting the delegation.

A "white paper" should be issued about objections to the government's draft notification which seeks to give Kunbi certificates to `sage-soyare' or kin of Marathas who have already established their Kunbi status, he said. Kunbis are an agrarian OBC community.

The 12-member delegation included ministers Chhagan Bhujbal, Atul Save, Girish Mahajan, Dhananjay Munde, Uday Samant and Member of Legislative Council Gopichand Padalkar.

Bhujbal, himself a prominent OBC leader, told reporters that Hake and Waghmare were invited to the all-party meeting called by the government on 29 June on the quota issue. —*PTI*

Chouhan's son says 'Delhi bowing down', trolled

BHOPAL, 22 JUNE

The son of Union Agriculture Minister and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that after the landslide victory in the Lok Sabha elections, "entire Delhi is bowing down" before his father.

Chouhan's son Kartikeya Singh made the statement while addressing a public meeting at Bherunda of Budhni assembly segment of Sehore district, on Friday. The video of the remark is being shared by the leaders of different parties.

Chouhan won the recently-held Lok Sabha election from Vidisha seat in the state.

State Congress Chief Jitu Patwari took a swipe at this statement, saying that it means that Delhi is scared and that there is fear of dissent within the party. Singh told the people of Budhni assembly seat that they have done a wonderful job of sending a message. Kartikeya Singh, an alumnus of University of Pennsylvania of US, also thanked the people of Budhni constituency supporting his father in the elections. —*PTI*

Shivraj Singh Chouhan PHOTO: PTI

MP Rashid denied parole, matter adjourned till 1 July

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Newly elected Lok Sabha MP from north Kashmir Sheikh Abdul Rashid, arrested in a 2017 Jammu and Kashmir terror funding case, failed to secure interim bail on Saturday with a special court here adjourning the matter till 1 July.

The court asked the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to file a response to his plea and also inform it about when he could take an oath as an MP.

The newly elected Lok Sabha MPs are scheduled to take oath on 24, 25 and 26 June.

During the hearing, Rashid's counsel sought custody parole for him to take oath and cited a recent order where AAP leader Sanjay Singh, an accused in the Delhi excise "scam" money laundering case, was allowed identical relief to take oath as a Rajya Sabha MP recently.

Additional Sessions Judge Kiran Gupta, however, observed that the charges levelled against Rashid, , were on a different footing from those faced by the AAP leader.

Rashid has moved the court seeking interim bail, or custody parole in the alternative, to take oath and perform his parliamentary functions. —*PTI*

Sheikh Abdul Rashid PHOTO: PTI

EXIT POLL SCAM CHARGE

Open to probe, says Axis My India Chief

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Facing Opposition fire for exit polls allegedly being used for stock market manipulation, Axis My India's chief Pradeep Gupta has said he is open to facing all kinds of investigations and it would help do business in a much better way if the government frames specific regulations for pollsters.

Opposition parties and several civil society groups have been asking for thorough investigations, including by capital markets regulator SEBI and a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), after the stock markets witnessed a massive rally when exit polls gave a huge majority to BJP but fell sharply after the actual results showed the ruling party falling short of a clear majority on its own.

Gupta said he has been demanding formulation of norms and regulations for pollsters since five years. Gupta, the chairman and managing director of Axis My India that had predicted 361-401 seats for the BJP-led alliance as against the actual tally of 240 seats, also termed as "childish" the demands for banning exit polls, saying every single citizen and organisation wants to know the election results and banning exit polls would serve no purpose.

"We have no connection with stock market whatsoever but I am happy to know these allegations because our data and system is so foolproof that any probe will give me an opportunity to showcase all of that is used to predict exit polls to the world.

In a way it is an opportunity for us, I support the demand as it will give us a chance to show our credentials," he said.

Axis My India has been conducting exit polls since 2013 after Gupta returned from the Harvard Business School and claims a track record of predicting 65 out of 69 elections correctly.

The pollster also responded to allegations of Axis My India also conducting exit polls for foreign investors and sharing different results with them. —*PTI*

Pradeep Gupta PHOTO: PTI

- Opposition parties and several civil society groups have been asking for thorough investigations, including by capital markets regulator SEBI and a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), after the stock markets witnessed a massive rally when exit polls gave a huge majority to BJP

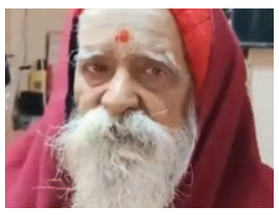


PHOTO: DD News

Chief priest of Ram temple ceremony dies at 86

VARANASI, 22 JUNE

Acharya Laxmikant Dixit, the chief priest who had performed the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, died Saturday morning. Family members said Dixit, 86, was not well for the last few days. His last rites will be conducted at Manikarnika Ghat. Lord Ram's idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on 22 January in an event led by Prime Minister Modi. Counted among the senior scholars of Varanasi, Dixit was a native of Solapur district of Maharashtra but his family has been living in Varanasi for several generations. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the death of Dixit. In a post on 'X', he said, "The departure of Acharya Shri Laxmikant Dixit, and the chief priest of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi, is an irreparable loss." *—PTI*

Assam: Kamakhya temple closes as fair begins

GUWAHATI, 22 JUNE

The annual Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya temple, atop Nilachal hills in Assam's Guwahati, commenced on Saturday with worship stopped for the next four days, coinciding with the ritualistic annual menstrual cycle of the goddess. Lakhs of devotees attend the mela and wait for the resumption of worship and pay obeisance to the goddess. Temple authorities said the doors were closed at 8.43am with the start of 'prabritti' and worship will resume at 9.07pm on 25 June after 'nribritti'. On 26 June, the temple door will open for darshan after a ritualistic bath and daily puja, they said. Worship is stopped and doors are closed in the temple for four days annually, when the goddess is believed to undergo her menstrual cycle. *—PTI*

Two more bombs found in Kannur district

KANNUR, 22 JUNE

Days after an elderly man died in a bomb explosion here, two more bombs were found on an uninhabited property in this politically volatile north Kerala district on Saturday, police said. During a search in the area, the police recovered two steel bombs (a kind of crude bomb) at a property on Ambilad road in Kuthuparamba here. An investigation is going on to find out how such highly explosive bombs were kept here, police said. The death of an 86-year-old man due to a bomb explosion near Thalassery on 18 June triggered a widespread political row in the state as the Opposition Congress and the BJP had pointed fingers at the ruling CPI(M). *—PTI*

Air Arabia flight gets hoax bomb threat in Calicut

KOZHIKODE, 22 JUNE

A hoax bomb threat was made with regard to an Air Arabia flight scheduled to leave for Sharjah from the Calicut International airport on Saturday morning, leading to the aircraft being grounded while the bomb detection squad of the police inspected it, airport sources said. One of the passengers who arrived on the aircraft from Sharjah to Calicut had left a note saying 'bomb' on one of the seats and it was found by the ground staff before boarding commenced, a senior airport official said. Subsequently, the police were alerted, the aircraft was grounded and the bomb detection squad carried out a thorough inspection of the plane, the official said. "It was later found that the note was a hoax bomb threat. The inspection and security drills have just been concluded. *—PTI*

UNICEF report says 1 in 4 children suffers food poverty

India ranks third after Afghanistan & Bhutan in Asia

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

One in four children lives in severe poverty in India, according to a UNICEF report titled 'Child Food Poverty: Nutrition deprivation in Early Childhood'. The report on child food poverty worldwide places 181 million children at risk of severe malnutrition. The report also suggests that India is among the worst hit.

The report categorises countries into low, medium, and high-risk groups, with India falling into the high-risk category.

Children living in acute food poverty are up to 50 per cent more likely to experience life-threatening malnutrition. They are largely fed starchy basics and breast milk or milk, with less than 10 per cent consuming fruits and vegetables and less than 5 per cent eating nutrient-dense meals such as eggs, fish, chicken, or meat.

Children living in acute food poverty are up to 50 per cent more likely to experience life-threatening malnutrition *PHOTO: UNICEF*

India: A Closer Look

India ranks among the top 25 countries with the highest rates of child food poverty. India ranks third in Asia, after Afghanistan and Bhutan. According to the report, a considerable proportion of Indian children under the age of five live in extreme food poverty, which is defined as consuming no more than two of the eight food groups per day.

Factors including restricted access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, limit advancement. The discrepancy between urban and rural regions exacerbates the problem, with rural children being more likely to suffer from acute food insecurity.

Causes of Child Food Poverty

Multiple factors contribute to the crisis. While household income is a significant determinant, the report indicates that more than half of the children experiencing severe food poverty live in relatively wealthier households.

Other critical drivers include poor food environments, inadequate feeding practices, and the aggressive marketing of cheap, unhealthy foods.

—Salar News with agencies

Rly tells drivers not to cross signals during glitches

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

The East Central Railway has directed station masters in its area not to issue the note that authorises train drivers to cross signals in case of failure of the automatic signalling system, days after the Kanchanjunga Express-goods train collision in another zone killed 10 people.

The decision to suspend the issuing of the T/A 912 written authority letter was taken at a safety meeting of the East Central Railway (ECR), according to a circular issued by the zone on 21 June.

On 17 June, the goods train rammed into the passenger train in West Bengal's Darjeeling District that falls under the Northeast Frontier Railway zone. Drivers of both trains had been issued the T/A 912 as the automatic signalling on the Ranipatra station-Chattar Hat Junction was "defective", officials had said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ANOTHER BIHAR BRIDGE DOWN

A bridge collapses in Bihar's Siwan district on Saturday. This is the second bridge collapse in the state in one week, raising questions over the quality of public works *PHOTO: X/ SCREENGRAB*

2 COPS HURT

Police personnel detain a person after stone pelting took place during a clash between two groups, in Jodhpur, on Friday night *PHOTO: PTI*

Clash in Jodhpur over construction work near Eidgah

JODHPUR, 22 JUNE

Two policemen were injured in stone-pelting, a shop was set on fire and two vehicles were damaged as communal violence erupted in a Jodhpur locality, police said on Saturday.

Jodhpur West DCP Rajesh Kumar Yadav said the clash began Friday night over the construction of a gate in the backside of an eidgah near Rajaram Circle in the Soor Sagar area here.

Locals in the area had opposed the gate so that there was no movement of people at the backside of the eidgah. Last night, tension escalated and some people pelted stones, injuring two policemen, DCP Yadav said.

"A shop and a tractor were set on fire, and a jeep was vandalised," a senior police officer said.

"Police dispersed people to their homes by using batons and fired 4-5 rounds of tear gas shells," the officer added.

By late Friday night, the situation was brought under control but the area remained tense. Heavy police and Rajasthan Armed Constabulary forces continue to be deployed on Saturday morning to maintain law and order.

> Locals in the area had opposed the gate so that there was no movement of people at the backside of the eidgah.Some people pelted stones, injuring two policemen

Police Commissioner Rajendra Singh said two FIRs were filed based on complaints from both sides.

Police said people from both sides have been taken into custody. Police are still raiding houses in the locality to apprehend suspects.

A brief peace was also worked out by the police with the help of senior members from both communities but sudden stone-pelting turned situation tense again. *—PTI*

MP to revamp sites linked to Ram & Krishna as pilgrimages

BHOPAL, 22 JUNE

Madhya Pradesh government will develop the places associated with Lord Ram and Lord Krishna in the state as pilgrimage sites, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said.

The government has also decided to construct welcome gates dedicated to these deities at the entry points of state capital Bhopal, he said.

CM Yadav issued directives to this effect during a review meeting of the Culture and Tourism Department on Friday, an official said.

"The Madhya Pradesh government will identify the places associated with Lord Ram and Lord Krishna in the state and develop them as pilgrimage sites," Yadav said.

He directed the department to construct welcome gates dedicated to Lord Rama and Lord Krishna at the entry points of Bhopal city and also make plans to set up entry gates dedicated to Raja Bhoj, an 11th century king from the Paramara dynasty, and Vikramaditya, a legendary king mentioned in Indian literature.

Mohan Yadav *PHOTO: PTI*

The department was also told to make an action plan to celebrate Gita Mahotsav on Manas Jayanti in the state to spread Indian culture and philosophy among the common people in the state.

The places associated with Lord Ram and Lord Krishna should be developed with the help of local elected representatives, Yadav said.

The number of tourists in the state has been growing, he said and emphasised the need for branding of the tourist places.

Local products and religious tourism should be promoted through various museums, the CM asked the officials. *—PTI*

TN Hooch tragedy: Death toll rises to 53; 7 people held

KALLAKURICHI, 22 JUNE

The death toll in the Kallakurichi Hooch tragedy has risen from 50 to 53, officials said on Saturday.

Kallakurichi District Collector MS Prasanth said that out of the total 193 patients, who consumed illicit liquor, 140 are currently safe.

"So far, seven people have been arrested in the case. The case has been given to the CBI CID branch of Tamil Nadu Police. The patients are being given best treatment. Special doctors were mobilised in the initial stage. About 56 doctors were brought in from different medical colleges. Many patients who had respiratory problems, have recovered too," the Kallakurichi Collector said.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the deaths in Kallakurichi in Tamil Nadu, 250 litres of illicit liquor were seized and disposed of in the state's Tiruchirapalli district.

The action was taken by Tiruchirapalli District Collector, Pradeep Kumar and Superintendent of Police, Varun Kumar, based on intelligence input.

Addressing a session in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, Chief Minister MK Stalin said the state government will take care of the entire education and hostel expenses of children who have lost either one or both of their parents in the Kallkurichi tragedy.

There was a ruckus in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, as Opposition AIADMK members raised slogans demanding discussion on the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy. *—ANI*

The death toll in this year's flood, landslides and storm has reached 37, while one person is missing *PHOTO: PTI*

3.9 lakh continue to reel under flood in Assam

GUWAHATI, 22 JUNE

More than 3.90 lakh people continued to reel under floodwater in Assam as the overall situation remained grim, officials said on Saturday.

Even though there was a marginal improvement in the flood situation with receding rainfall bringing respite in some parts of the state, 19 districts still remained affected, they said.

The death toll in this year's flood, landslides and storm has reached 37, while one person is missing, the officials said.

Altogether 3,90,491 people remained affected in Kamrup, Tamulpur, Hailakandi, Udalguri, Hojai, Dhubri, Barpeta, Biswanath, Nalbari, Bongaigaon, Baksa, Karimganj, South Salmara, Goalpara, Darrang, Bajali, Nagaon, Cachar and Kamrup Metropolitan districts as on Friday evening. *—PTI*

Grateful to HC for allowing release of 'Maharaj': YRF

MUMBAI, 22 JUNE

Yash Raj Films (YRF), the banner behind "Maharaj" that marks the debut of Bollywood star Aamir Khan's son Junaid, has expressed gratitude to the judiciary after the Gujarat High Court lifted an interim stay on the film's release.

The period drama, set in pre-independent India, is based on the Maharaj Libel Case of 1862.

The Court observed that "Maharaj" did not target the Vaishnav Pushtimarg sect as alleged by its members, who had filed a petition against the release of the film, claiming that it hurts religious sentiments. The film has nothing objectionable or derogatory, the court said after watching it, and allowed its release on streaming platform Netflix. *—PTI*

DUE TO INFRA DEVELOPMENT

Rubber growers in Kerala seek other jobs

KOTTAYAM, 22 JUNE

The rubber growers in Kerala are shifting to other income-earning activities due to infrastructure development happening in the state, outgoing Rubber Board Chairman, Sawar Dhanania, said on Saturday.

Speaking to the media, Dhanania said if the rubber cultivators persist, then within a decade, the country will produce more rubber than it demands.

"There is immense potential because rubber plantations in Kerala began 75 years ago, spanning three generations of cultivation. However, due to more infrastructure developments, the growers in the state are shifting to other activities with better earning opportunities," he said.

If the rubber cultivators persist, then within a decade, the country will produce more rubber than it demands *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

Dhanania requested rubber growers in Kerala to remain with the cultivation, even if on a limited scale.

"They (rubber growers) are the experts and pioneers in this field, and their continued involvement is crucial for the country. If they persist with rubber cultivation, I am confident that within a decade, the country will produce more rubber than it demands," he added.

He also urged rubber farmers to trust and have confidence in the Rubber Board and the union government.

Dhanania met the media after his term as the Chairman came to an end today after a tenure of five years. *—PTI*

Holy Mass row: Priests reject fresh note by church

KOCHI, 22 JUNE

Priests protesting the changes to Holy Mass in the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese on Saturday rejected a fresh note from the synod of the Syro-Malabar Church, calling it an attempt to incite conflict in the parishes.

The post-synodal note came amidst a raging row over a circular issued by the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church head Raphael Thattil on 9 June, 2024, giving an ultimatum to the priests who do not comply with its directive to hold uniform Holy Mass in the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese starting from 3 July this year.

Thattil and the Apostolic Administrator of the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese, Bosco Puthoor, on Friday issued a post-synodal note addressing the priests and faithful in the archdiocese.

Among the decisions, the church said the circular issued by it on 9 June would continue to stand and all priests should hold the mass in a standardised manner as directed earlier.

The relaxation was given based on the directive of Pope Francis to give awareness about the Uniform Holy Mass, the post-synodal note further added. *—PTI*

STRAWBERRY SUPERMOON

A Strawberry Supermoon sets behind rock formations known as "Fairy Chimneys" at Phrygian valley in Afyonkarahisar, western Turkey. A supermoon is a full moon that is closest to Earth. Strawberry moon is the last full moon in June and was named by Native American tribes as it coincides with strawberry harvest. This once in 18.6 year event is also known as lunar standstill or lunistice. Here, moon and Earth are titled to the maximum and the moon rises and sets at the extreme northern and southern points on the horizon ***PHOTO: PTI***

Can farmers adapt to erratic monsoons?

Each year from June to September, a heavy band of rain makes its way from southwest coast to its northeastern borders, quenching farmers' thirsty fields.

India's monsoon season is arguably the single most important weather phenomenon for the country, and a good monsoon can noticeably boost the nation's economy and the livelihoods of its 120 million farmers. But human-caused climate change is making the rainfall more erratic, making it difficult for farmers to plant, grow and harvest crops on their rain-fed fields.

"Either it rains too much within a short time or it doesn't rain at all," said Vijay Jawandhia, a 77-year-old farmer in Maharashtra. Jawandhia grows cotton, soya bean and various other crops that require a relatively cool climate and constant irrigation for the first few weeks after sowing. "We planted our cotton seeds after a good monsoon was predicted but it rained just two days and stopped after, so now we're worried our crops will fail again."

Indian Meteorological Department had predicted good rainfall from the monsoon clouds earlier this year, but extreme heat in northern India stalled the rain's progress. The agency revised its predictions in June, saying the rainfall this year will be less than previously expected.

Many are looking for ways to adapt to this new, unpredictable reality. Experts suggest growing crops that need less water, better and more localized forecasting methods and protection against unexpected weather. But changing centuries-old ways of tending to the land won't be an easy task.

How is climate change affecting monsoons?

India typically has two monsoons: one from June to September moving southwest to northeast, and another from October to December going the opposite direction.

The erratic rain is a significant blow to farmers' livelihoods ***PHOTO: PTI***

But with more planet-warming gases in the air, the rain now only loosely follows this pattern. This is because the warmer air can hold more moisture from the Indian Ocean, and that rain then gets dumped all at once. It means the monsoon is punctuated with intense flooding and dry spells, rather than sustained rain throughout.

"When it rains now, it rains heavily," said Madhavan Rajeevan, a retired senior official at Ministry of Earth Sciences. Rajeevan has tracked the monsoons for decades, and has noticed "the number of rainy days is decreasing even though the total amount of seasonal rainfall has remained the same for the last century or so."

Landslides and flooding are increasing, he said, alongside high temperatures and longer periods of drought that are adding to farmer's woes.

The flooding can also result in death and economic losses, such as the hundreds killed and the over $1.42 billion in damages in Himachal Pradesh in 2023 because of heavy monsoon rains.

Rajeevan added that hydropower resources that generate large amounts of electricity are also built with sustained rains in mind, and extreme rain and floods can lead to health issues such as increased cases of typhoid, cholera and malaria.

What does this mean for farmers?

The erratic rain is a significant blow to their livelihood.

Maharashtra has witnessed thousands of farmers dying by suicide that many say is a result of agriculture-related debt. "Our region has become infamous for this," said Jawandhia, the farmer.

Farmers in traditionally resource-rich regions, such as Punjab and Haryana in northern India, also say they are adversely affected by both fewer rainy days and too much rain when it pours.

Tezveer Singh, a farmer in Ambala city in Haryana remembers how "entire towns and fields were flooded, hundreds of cattle died due to drowning and three people lost their lives" there in last year's flooding.

Singh grows rice, potatoes and sugarcane on his 20-acre farm and said urgent policy changes are needed to stop flood damage.

He suggested that officials can "give compensation for our losses when needed, provide climate-resilient seeds, make supply chains for farm produce more efficient and increase minimum prices for crops."

How can they adapt?

Weather agency makes state-level monsoon rain predictions for the entire country, but climate experts say forecasts need to be more localized in order to be useful to farmers.

Vishwas Chitale, who leads the climate resilience team at the New Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water, said making localized weather predictions and changing the times of year farmers plant their crops accordingly can help.

In many places across India, "maximum rainfall occurs in October now and not really June and July as it used to," said Chitale, who also co-authored a 2024 report looking at India's changing monsoon patterns. "This results in a lot of crops that are waiting to be harvested getting damaged."

He added that it's important that better forecasting is available for everyone across the country who needs it.

Some farmers are already adapting to a warmer world. In southern Kerala state, an organic farming collective has begun altering when they sow and harvest plants according to shifting rain patterns. The farming collective has also drawn up an agriculture calendar that factors in climate change that they share with other local farmers. "The preparedness helps farmers," said Rajesh Krishnan, a paddy farmer who's part of the collective that worked with local weather officials on the forecasts. Krishnan said their daily and weekly forecasts have an accuracy of at least 70 per cent. "This is helping cut losses and also get a better crop. The forecasts are also helping us decide when to harvest our crops," he said.

Climate experts like Rajeevan said the collective's model needs to be replicated across the country to allow farmers to work with the changing monsoons.

—Courtesy, The Washington Post

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Gaza's destroyed water system is killing children

Five-year-old Tala Ibrahim Muhammad al-Jalat is just about awake but not moving, her milky eyes rolled to the back of her head.

Tala is severely dehydrated and malnourished.

By her bedside in Nasser hospital in Khan Younis her father Ibrahim Muhmmad al-Jalat holds her hand, careful not to disturb the intravenous drip feeding into her wrist.

He knows that the scorching weather, with temperatures close to 40 degrees, and a lack of clean water have brought his daughter close to death.

"The situation is getting worse," he says.

"The temperature in our tent is unimaginable, and the water we drink is definitely contaminated, because both young and old are getting sick."

With their homes destroyed, hundreds of thousands of Gazans are now displaced, living under canvas in makeshift camps with little protection from the scorching sun.

Getting water, whether it is clean or not, is a daily struggle. Long queues form at distribution centres.

With the sewage system badly damaged and with few toilets, what water there is is easily contaminated.

"It is no secret that the biggest cause of intestinal infections currently occurring in the Gaza Strip is the contamination of the water supplied to these children," says Dr Ahmed al-Fari, head of the children's departments at Nasser Hospital.

"The first problem is intestinal infections with vomiting and diarrhoea which causes dehydration," he says.

"The second problem is hepatitis C or A, which are no less dangerous than intestinal infections, if not more so."

- The Israeli military says it is allowing around 200 trucks carrying humanitarian aid to enter the strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing every day. It says the problem is that aid agencies on the other side are not distributing it.

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs says 67% of Gaza's water and sanitation system, poor at the best of times, has now been destroyed.

"We need a tremendous international effort to re-establish water and sewage networks," says Salaam Sharab, who's a water engineer in the Khan Younis municipality.

"We in Khan Younis have lost between 170 and 200km of pipes, which have been completely destroyed, along with wells and water tanks."

The Israeli military says it is allowing around 200 trucks carrying humanitarian aid to enter the strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing every day.

It says the problem is that aid agencies on the other side are not distributing it.

The aid agencies argue continued fighting, especially in the area around Rafah in southern Gaza, means it is too dangerous for them to operate.

They also say what's being allowed in is a drop in the ocean of what's actually needed.

Children with pre-existing conditions can be especially hard hit by malnutrition and contaminated water.

Lying semi-conscious on a bed further down the corridor from Tala is nine-year-old Yunis Jumaa, who has cerebral palsy.

His mother Ghanima says eight months of war have dramatically worsened his health.

"When he developed this malnutrition and dehydration, he became as you see him now," she says.

"There is no bottled water. The children walk a long distance - when they get water it reaches us contaminated," she adds.

Gazans' growing desperation to get food and water means there is also a threat of looting with reports of aid trucks being ransacked by gunmen as well as by ordinary civilians.

But the International Criminal Court prosecutor has accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war and has requested arrest warrants for the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as the Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

The Israeli government has reacted with outrage at the move.

It insists that claims by aid agencies that there is already widespread famine in Gaza are exaggerated and says it is Hamas which started the war, bringing suffering and misery to Palestinians.

The United Nations has warned that more than a million Gazans face the highest level of starvation by the middle of July.

Israeli ministers deny there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. But for Ibrahim Muhmmad al-Jalat and Ghanima Jumaa at their children's bedsides in Nasser hospital, it doesn't feel that way. *—BBC News*

Many children in Gaza suffer due to lack of clean water amid the heat. Here, nine-year-old Yunis Jumaa, a cerebral palsy patient, is admitted to a hospital due to malnutrition as mom Ghanima looks on ***PHOTO: BBC***

Bystander effect to blame for public apathy during crimes: Experts

As 32-year-old Rohit Yadav clobbered his "ex-girlfriend" Arati Yadav with a spanner in Maharashtra's Vasai earlier this week, the inaction of several bystanders was equally shocking, if not more.

Even as the 22-year-old woman collapsed, the man kept hitting her lifeless body while shouting "Kyun kiya aisa mere sath? (why did you do this to me)". The broad daylight murder was another in the list of similar incidents where people chose to remain mute spectators instead of restraining or apprehending the assailant.

In May last year, a 16-year-old girl was killed by her alleged boyfriend who stabbed her more than 30 times and hit her with a concrete slab on a busy street in Delhi's Shahbad Dairy area.

Most of the people chose to walk past while some stood quietly, witnessing the gruesome act.

What's common at the sites of these incidents of crimes of passion? The presence of passive spectators either choosing not to get involved or worse, filming the crime on their smartphones to share on social media for a few likes and followers.

The general apathy among the public towards such incidents can be attributed to the bystander effect and the psychological phenomenon of diffusion of responsibility, experts said.

According to clinical psychologist Shweta Sharma, when there are several witnesses, an individual might feel "less personal responsibility to act".

"We call it a bystander effect. There are some psychological and social factors behind this bystander effect. The first thing is the diffusion of responsibility, when many people are present so individuals might assume that someone else will intervene," Sharma told PTI.

This thought of staying inactive gains strength from fear for one's safety.

In a similar incident in October 2022, a 19-year-old was chased down a busy street by three men and stabbed to death in Delhi's Sunder Nagri. It happened barely a month after a man was stabbed in a busy market of Northwest Delhi's Begumpur. "They also fear for their personal safety. They feel if they are going to intervene, it might put their own safety at risk, especially if the situation involves violence," she added. The CCTV footage of the Vasai incident showed a man trying to stop Rohit Yadav from hitting the girl only to be pushed back as the accused waved the spanner at him. Sharma added that the increasing presence of social media in daily life has also normalised such incidents whose videos go "viral" – resulting in a lack of confidence in people to determine the appropriate behaviour in such situations.

"If others are not reacting, a person may interpret the situation as less urgent or assume help is not needed... They don't feel confident to act on it.

"So this lack of confidence is also a part of the bystander effect," Sharma, a panel psychologist at the Juvenile Justice Board, Gurugram, said.

A CCTV footage shows a woman being clobbered to death by a youth as bystanders watch in Maharashtra's Vasai on 19 June ***PHOTO: PTI***

Another disturbing reality of such macabre incidents is that there are people who record the crimes and then circulate them on social media to satisfy their insatiable hunger for likes, comments and followers.

In September 2022, a young woman from a village in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, was allegedly gang-raped, stripped and walked for two kilometres naked, battered, bruised and bleeding, her trauma captured in a grainy video that went viral. In the Vasai incident, police detained a man and a woman who shot videos of the attack and uploaded them on social media.

- In September 2022, a young woman from a village in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, was allegedly gang-raped, stripped and walked for two kilometres naked, battered, bruised and bleeding, her trauma captured in a grainy video that went viral. In the Vasai incident, police detained a man and a woman who shot videos of the attack and uploaded them on social media.

Forensic psychologist Deepti Puranik called it a new trend that has made people "less empathetic towards the victim".

"Currently, we are in a digital world where technology is easily accessible and people are hooked to their mobile. Everyone wants to upload something unique on their social media accounts and get maximum likes to become popular," Puranik told PTI.

"In the competition to get maximum likes, individuals have lost their sense of right or wrong and are less empathetic," she added.

A global programme for sensitisation about mental health issues, and violent crimes is the way forward, both Puranik and Sharma noted.

"Sensitisation about the violence, sensitisation about consensual relationship, sensitisation about the emotional regulation, this is much more important, only than certain kinds of acts of violence, especially in intimate partner relationships will decrease," Sharma said.

Puranik said it is important to create awareness programmes to sensitise the public towards their responsibility.

"When you are not helping a citizen when a crime is happening it means you are a passive participant of that crime. One most important way by which we can address the issue of bystander apathy is to create awareness programmes for the public," she said. *—PTI*

Italy recovers 14 more bodies after migrant shipwreck

ROME, 22 JUNE

The Italian coast guard on Friday recovered 14 more bodies from last week's migrant shipwreck in the Ionian Sea off the southern Italian coastline, bringing to 34 the number of known victims from the sinking. Dozens are still missing and presumed dead. The bodies were being transferred to a port in Calabria. Three coast guard ships were active in the air-and-sea search, 190 kilometres from shore. Survivors reported that the motorboat had caught fire, causing it to capsize off the Italian coast overnight last Sunday, according to the UN refugee agency and other UN organisations. The latest deaths bring to more than 800 people who have died or went missing and are presumed dead crossing the central Mediterranean so far this year, an average of five dead a day, the UN agencies said. *—AP*

El Salvador death toll rises to 19 as rains continue

SAN SALVADOR, 22 JUNE

The torrential rains hitting El Salvador caused the deaths of another six people on Friday when two girls and four adults were killed after being buried in their homes. Wall collapses and landslides on the outskirts of the capital brought a total of 19 dead. Two weather systems — one along Guatemala's Pacific coast and the other in the Gulf of Mexico that developed Tropical Storm Alberto — have brought saturating rains to southern Mexico and Central America. The Civil Protection authorities of El Salvador issued a red alert and the country's Congress declared a state of national emergency for 15 days because of the severity of the rains. *—AP*

US: 3 killed in Arkansas grocery store shooting

LITTLE ROCK, 22 JUNE

A shooter who opened fire Friday at a grocery store in Arkansas left the store and parked cars riddled with bullet holes as bystanders ducked for cover both indoors and in the parking lot, killing 3 people and wounding 10 others, authorities said. The wounded included two law enforcement officers who exchanged fire with the shooter, state police said. The shooting occurred about 11.30 am at the Mad Butcher grocery store in Fordyce, a city of about 3,200 people located 104 kilometres south of Little Rock. "It's tragic, our hearts are broken," Col. Mike Hagar, director of State Police and public safety secretary, told reporters Friday. Neither the officers' nor the suspected shooter's injuries were life threatening. It is the latest mass shooting where a grocery store is its backdrop. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

22 suspected terrorists held in Pak's Punjab

LAHORE, 22 JUNE

Police in Pakistan's Punjab province on Saturday claimed to have foiled a major terror plot with the arrest of 22 suspected terrorists of ISIS, TTP and other banned organisations According to a Counter Terrorism Department Spokesperson, it conducted 152 intelligence-based operations in different districts of Punjab this week and arrested 22 suspected terrorists belonging to ISIS, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Balochistan Liberation Army and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Explosives weighing 1,645 grams, three hand grenades, one IED bomb, 12 detonators, a safety fuse wire measuring 32 feet, a pistol and banned literature have allegedly been recovered from them. *—PTI*

Russia launches attack on Ukrainian power grid

The attack marks the eighth such incident in three months

KYIV, 22 JUNE

Ukraine says its energy facilities have come under a "massive" attack from Russia overnight, in the latest onslaught targeting the country's power grid.

It is the eighth time Russia has launched an attack on energy infrastructure facilities in the past three months, Ukraine's energy ministry said.

This comes days after Russian President Vladimir Putin met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang where they signed an agreement pledging that Russia and North Korea will help each other in the event of "aggression" against either country.

Air defence systems shot down 12 of 16 missiles and all 13 drones launched by Russia at several regions through the night, the Ukrainian air force said. Two energy workers were wounded and taken to hospital in the Zaporizhzhia region, and energy equipment was damaged in the Western city of Lviv, officials added.

In the south-western region of Ivano-Frankivsk, the authorities also reported damage to houses and a kindergarten.

The attack is the second to target energy infrastructure this week *PHOTO: PTI*

Russia has renewed its campaign of strikes on Ukrainian energy targets over spring and early summer, causing frequent blackouts across the country. President Volodymyr Zelensky recently said Moscow had destroyed half of his country's electricity-generating capacity since it began pummelling its energy facilities in late March.

Saturday night's attack is the second to target energy infrastructure this week.

Ukraine is buying energy from the European Union, however, this is not enough to make up the deficit.

This means that most days involve a planned nationwide blackout to protect critical infrastructure such a hospitals and military facilities.

- Russia has renewed its campaign of strikes on Ukrainian energy targets over spring and early summer, causing frequent blackouts across the country

"We urgently need to close our skies or Ukraine faces a serious crisis this winter," the Chief Executive DTEK, of one of Ukraine's largest private energy companies, Maxim Timchenko said.

"My plea to allies is to help us defend our energy system and rebuild in time."

Zelenskyy has repeatedly called on Ukraine's allies to send more air defence systems. He has specifically requested seven sophisticated air defence systems called Patriots from the US.

Ivan Fedorov, Zaporizhzhia's governor, echoed Zelenskyy's message on Saturday morning in a message posted to Telegram. *—AP*

AFTER PUTIN'S N KOREA TRIP

US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea for military drills

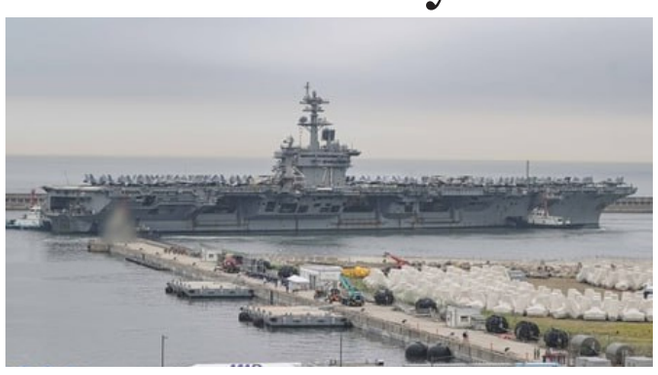
SEOUL, 22 JUNE

A nuclear-powered United States aircraft carrier arrived Saturday in South Korea for a three-way exercise stepping up their military training to cope with North Korean threats that escalated with its alignment with Russia.

The arrival of the USS Theodore Roosevelt strike group in Busan came a day after South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest a pact reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week that pledges mutual defense assistance in the event of war.

South Korea says the deal poses a threat to its security and warned that it could consider sending arms to Ukraine to help fight off the Russian invasion as a response — a move that would surely ruin its relations with Moscow.

Following a meeting between their defense chiefs in Singapore earlier in June, the US, South Korea and Japan announced Freedom Edge. The new multidomain exercise is aimed at sharpening the countries' combined response in various areas of operation, including air, sea and cyberspace.



The Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier is anchored in Busan, South Korea, on Saturday *PHOTO: X/@KALEMIPOST*

The Theodore Roosevelt strike group will participate in the exercise that is expected to start within June. South Korea's military didn't immediately confirm specific details of the training.

South Korea's navy said in a statement that the arrival of Theodore Roosevelt demonstrates the strong defense posture of the allies and "stern willingness to respond to advancing North Korean threats." The carrier's visit comes seven months after another US aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to South Korea in a show of strength against the North.

In the face of growing North Korean threats, the United States, South Korea and Japan have expanded their combined training and boosted the visibility of strategic US military assets in the region, seeking to intimidate the North. *—AP*

Attacker of Pelosi's husband found guilty of kidnapping

SAN FRANCISCO, 22 JUNE

A man who bludgeoned former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband with a hammer and was sentenced to 30 years in federal court was also convicted Friday of aggravated kidnapping by a state court which could put him behind bars for life.

A San Francisco jury found David DePape also guilty of first-degree burglary, false imprisonment of an elder, threatening a family member of a public official and dissuading a witness. The convictions on the additional charges come weeks after a federal judge sentenced DePape for the 2022 attack against Paul Pelosi, and will add a possible life sentence without possibility of parole. DePape's public defender Adam Lipson said he was disappointed with the verdict and plans to appeal it. He called the prosecutors' decision to file a kidnapping for ransom charge "vindictive."

"It's really unfortunate that it was charged this way. It was sort of a textbook vindictive prosecution," Lipson said. "As soon as they found that the attempted murder charge was going to be dismissed, they added this charge." *—AP*

US proposes restrictions for investments in Chinese tech

WASHINGTON, 22 JUNE

The Treasury Department on Friday fleshed out a proposed rule that would restrict and monitor US investments in China for artificial intelligence, computer chips and quantum computing.

The proposed rule stems from President Joe Biden's August 2023 executive order regarding the access that "countries of concern" have to American dollars that fund advanced technologies, which the US government says would enhance their military, intelligence, surveillance and cyber capabilities. The order identified China, Hong Kong and Macau as countries of concern. The Biden administration has sought to stymie the development of technologies by China, the world's second-largest economy, that could give it a military edge or enable it to dominate emerging sectors such as electric vehicles.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

In addition to the proposed rule, Democrat Biden has also placed a stiff tariff on Chinese EVs, an issue with political implications as the president and Republican Donald Trump are both trying to show voters who can best stand up to China, a geopolitical rival and major trading partner. The proposed rule outlines the required information that US citizens must provide when engaging in transactions in this area, as well as what would be considered a violation of the restrictions. *—AP*

No Afghan women in UN meet, envoy defends move

UNITED NATIONS, 22 JUNE

- Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said that the UN plans to hold a meeting "without women's rights on the agenda or Afghan women in the room are shocking."

The United Nations' top official in Afghanistan defended the failure to include Afghan women in the upcoming first meeting between the Taliban and envoys from 22 countries, insisting that demands for women's rights are certain to be raised.

UN special envoy Roza Otunbayeva was pummelled with questions Friday from journalists about criticism from human rights organisations at the omission of Afghan women from the meeting in Qatar's capital, Doha, on 30 June and 1 July.

The Taliban seized power in 2021 as United States and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. No country officially recognises them as Afghanistan's government, and the UN has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place.

Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said that, in the face of the Taliban's tightening repression of women and girls, the UN plans to hold a meeting "without women's rights on the agenda or Afghan women in the room are shocking."

The meeting is the third UN-sponsored gathering on the Afghan crisis in Doha. The Taliban weren't invited to the first, and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said they set unacceptable conditions for attending the second in February, including demands that Afghan civil society members be excluded from the talks and that they be treated as the country's legitimate rulers. *—AP*

50 WOUNDED

Israel strikes camps near Rafah, 25 killed

Palestinians at the edge of a crater after an Israeli airstrike in an area where displaced people are sheltering in southern Gaza Strip *PHOTO: PTI*

DEIR AL-BALAH, 22 JUNE

At least 25 people were killed and 50 were wounded on Friday as Israeli forces shelled tent camps for displaced Palestinians north of Gaza's southern city of Rafah, according to the territory's Heath Ministry and emergency workers. It was the latest deadly attack in the tiny Palestinian enclave where hundreds of thousands have fled fighting between Israel and Hamas.

According to a Spokesperson for the Civil Defense first responders in Rafah, Ahmed Radwan, witnesses told rescue workers about the shelling at two locations in a coastal area that has become filled with tents. Israel has previously bombed locations in the vicinity of the "humanitarian zone" in Muwasi, a rural area on the Mediterranean coast that has filled with sprawling tent camps in recent months.

Witnesses whose relatives were killed in one of the bombardments near a Red Cross field hospital said that Israeli forces fired a second volley that killed people who had come out of their tents.

The attack began with a munition that only made a loud bang and bright flash, said Mona Ashour, who lost her husband after he went to investigate what was happening.

"We were in our tent, and they hit with a sound bomb' near the Red Cross tents, and then my husband came out at the first sound," Ashour said, holding back tears while clutching a young girl outside Nasser Hospital in nearby Khan Younis.

"And then they hit with the second one, which was a little closer to the entrance of the Red Cross," she said.

The strikes came as Israel pushed ahead with its military operation in Rafah, where over a million Palestinians had sought refuge from fighting elsewhere in Gaza. Most have now fled Rafah, but the United Nations says no place in Gaza is safe and humanitarian conditions are dire as families shelter in tents and cramped apartments without adequate food, water, or medical supplies.

Israel says it is targeting Hamas fighters and infrastructure and that it tries to minimise civilian deaths. *—AP*

Hindujas 'appalled' by court's ruling; file appeal

LONDON, 22 JUNE

Britain's wealthiest family, the Hindujas, have said they were "appalled" by a Swiss court's ruling of jail terms for some members and have filed an appeal in a higher court challenging the verdict finding them guilty of exploiting vulnerable domestic workers from India at their villa in Geneva.

In a statement issued on behalf of the family on Friday, lawyers from Switzerland stressed their clients – Prakash and Kamal Hinduja, both in their 70s and their son Ajay and his wife Namrata – had been acquitted of all human trafficking charges.

"Our clients have been acquitted of all human trafficking charges. We are appalled and disappointed by the rest of the decision made in this court of first instance, and we have, of course, filed an appeal to the higher court, thereby making this part of the judgement not effective," reads the statement signed by lawyers Yael Hayat and Robert Assael and Roman Jordan.

The family members were accused of seizing their domestic workers' passports, barring them from leaving the villa and forcing them to work very long hours for a pittance in Switzerland, among other things. Some workers allegedly spoke only Hindi and were paid their wages in rupees in banks back in India that they could not access. *—AP*

The Hinduja family were accused of seizing theor domestic workers' passports and forcing them to work long hours *PHOTO: X/@ABHISHEKSAY*

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

US states mull phone ban in schools

NEW YORK, 22 JUNE

As a middle-school teacher, Nancy Streit understands how hard it can be to compete with a smartphone for a child's attention.

But as a mother, she knows the devices are a necessity when there's an emergency.

"It's mostly the parents calling," she says, adding that while she doesn't allow phone use in her classroom, students routinely skirt the rules.

The Los Angeles school district where Streit teaches - the second largest school district in the country - is the latest to ban smartphone use in schools this week. It is part of a growing and familiar trend as more states and schools across the US weigh how to manage the growing dependency children have on their devices.

The efforts mark the latest chapter in a long debate over policing smartphone use in schools, and comes amid a wave of concern about youth mental health in the aftermath of the pandemic. Most US schools already have some kind of phone policy. About 76 per cent of schools prohibited their non-academic use in the 2021-2022 school year, according to the US Department of Education.

About 76 per cent of schools prohibited their non-academic use in the 2021-2022 school year *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

The 1999 shooting at Colorado's Columbine High School, in which 13 people died, led some parents and schools to reassess phones as a key communication tool for emergencies. States relaxed the rules – including California, which repealed a phone ban in 2002.

The current wave of policies comes as experts express concern about student mental health and social media use.

Adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of mental health problems. *—PTI*

UK FIRST TO BAN MOBILE PHONES IN 2024

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in February had announced that mobile phones will be prohibited in schools across the United Kingdom. Using mobile phones in schools can lead to online bullying, distraction which can lead to lost learning time the UK's Department for Education had stated. ParentKind's National Parent Survey said that 44 per cent of parents are concerned about the amount of time their children spend on phones. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Magic Bus to train 65L youths with employability skills

MUMBAI, 22 JUNE

Magic Bus, a non-profit organisation in the education and skilling space, aims to impart essential life and employability skills in over 65 lakh young people from marginalised communities over the next five years. The NGO operates in 23 states and union territories and operates out of 117 livelihood centres, of which 17 are all-girl centres. It imparts essential life skills and employability skills in young people from underserved communities. "Since 1999, Magic Bus has impacted 30 lakh adolescents, equipping them with life skills to achieve school, life, and work outcomes. We have empowered over 3.7 lakh youths with life and employability skills, connecting them to sustainable livelihood opportunities. Looking ahead, we aim to extend its impact by empowering over 65 lakh young people over the next five years," Magic Bus India Foundation founder Matthew Spacie told PTI. Life skills education serves as a cornerstone for the holistic development of young people and are essential for them to navigate life and work in an increasingly technology-driven world, he said Magic Bus India Foundation Global CEO Jayant Rastogi stated that the organisation conducts thorough assessments of the demand-supply gap before introducing new skills or phasing out obsolete ones.*—PTI*

CNG price in Delhi, adjoining cities hiked by ₹ 1/kg

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

CNG price in the national capital and adjoining cities was on Saturday hiked by Re 1/kg on the back of reduction in domestic gas supplies. CNG price was hiked from Rs 74.09 to Rs 75.09 per kg, while in Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad the rate went up from Rs 78.70 to Rs 79.70 per kg, according to information posted by IGL on its website. Other city gas suppliers have not changed the prices yet.*—PTI*

GRSE to construct 4 cargo ships for German firm

KOLKATA, 22 JUNE

Defence PSU Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) Ltd on Saturday signed an agreement with a Germany-based shipping company for the construction and delivery of four multi-purpose cargo vessels, an official said. The contract is worth approximately USD 54 million and the order is to be executed in 33 months, GRSE informed the National Stock Exchange and BSE. GRSE signed the agreement with shipping company Carsten Rehder Schiffsmakler und Reederei GmbH and Co. KG, Germany, for the construction and delivery of four multi-purpose vessels with an option of building another four ships in near future, the GRSE official said in a statement. The vessels will be 120 metres long and 17 metres wide and can carry 7,500 metric tonnes of cargo each, the GRSE official said. The vessels will have a single cargo hold each to accommodate bulk, general and project cargoes, with provision for carrying containers on hatch covers, he said, adding that the ships have been specifically designed to carry multiple large windmill blades on deck. The Kolkata-based PSU warship maker has been actively pursuing exports in both maritime and commercial vessels and has built and delivered an offshore patrol vessel to Mauritius, a fast patrol vessel to Seychelles and a passenger-cum-cargo ocean-going ferry to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the official said. GRSE is currently in the process of building six patrol boats and a dredger for Bangladesh, he said. *—PTI*

Govt buys onion for buffer stock, retail rates may ease

Govt expects prices to reduce as monsoon progresses

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

The government has bought nearly 71,000 tonnes of onion so far this year for buffer stock, out of the total target of procuring 5 lakh tonnes for price stabilisation and it expects retail prices to ease with the progress of monsoon over most parts of the country. According to data compiled by the department of consumer affairs, the all-India average onion retail prices stood at Rs 38.67 per kg on Friday, while the modal price was Rs 40 per kg.

Till 20 June, the Centre has procured 70,987 tonnes of onion, as against 74,071 tonnes procured in the same period last year, a senior official in the department of consumer affairs said.

"The pace of onion procurement for price stabilisation buffer this year is largely comparable with last year, despite about 20 per cent decline in estimated rabi production," the official said, adding that the government is on course to achieve targeted procurement of 5 lakh tonnes for price stabilisation.

Government will exercise the option of holding or releasing onions from the buffer in order to maintain stability in prices of onion *PHOTO: PTI*

The government will exercise the option of holding or releasing onions from the buffer in order to maintain stability in prices of onion, the official said.

The increase in prices of onion is on account of a shortfall in production in 2023-24 by about 20 per cent each in Kharif, late Kharif and Rabi, over the previous year due to less rains in major producing areas, the official explained.

To control prices, the government has been taking measures in a graded manner, from August last year starting with export duty of 40 per cent, followed by Minimum Export Price (MEP) of USD 800 per tonne in October, 2024 and imposition of export prohibition from 8 December, 2023.

These measures have helped in maintaining domestic availability of onion at reasonably stable prices.

Export prohibition had been lifted from 4May, 2024 with MEP of USD 550 per tonne and 40 per cent export duty in view of substantial stability observed in major mandis like Lasalgaon, in Maharashtra and the prospect of good Kharif production on the back of above-normal monsoon prediction this year.

"The prolonged and extreme heatwave condition currently prevailing over large parts of the country has impacted the production of green vegetables and led to increase in prices of vegetables including tomato, potato and onion," the official said, adding that

the situation is expected to ease with the onset of monsoon over most parts of the country. *—PTI*

16 PER CENT OPPOSE

Reliance said its shareholders through a postal ballot approved the reappointment of Al Rumayyan *PHOTO: X/ @reliancegroup*

RIL shareholders split on Aramco head's reappointment

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Reliance Industries' shareholders have approved the reappointment of Saudi Aramco Chairman Yasir Othman H Al-Rumayyan as an independent director on the company's board for five years but over 16 per cent voted against the proposal.

In a stock exchange filing, Reliance said its shareholders through a postal ballot approved the reappointment of Al Rumayyan as well as appointment of Haigreve Khaitan as independent directors on the board. They also approved reappointment of long-time company executive PMS Prasad as a director for another five years.

The resolution for reappointment of Al Rumayyan was carried with 83.97 per cent voting in favour of the resolution. As many as 16.02 per cent voted against it , the filing showed.

Al-Rumayyan, who also heads Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund - among the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world, was first appointed on Reliance board in 2021 for a three-year term. His first term ends on 18 July, 2024. And now he has been reappointed till 18 July, 2029.

Khaitan, who is a partner in Khaitan & Co, was appointed as independent director for five years starting 1 April, 2024. But the resolution for his appointment too saw nearly 13 per cent shareholders voting against it.

As many as 87.15 per cent shareholders voted in favour of his appointment, the filing showed.He has been brought in to provide legal heft to the board. Late ML Bhakta, founding partner of Kanga & Co, was the last legal luminary on Reliance board, serving for nearly 42 years till he stepped down due to his advancing age in 2019.

- The resolution for reappointment of Al Rumayyan was carried with 83.97 per cent voting in favour of the resolution. As many as 16.02 per cent voted against it , the filing showed. Al-Rumayyan, who also heads Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund - was first appointed on Reliance board in 2021

The company has not had any legal professional as a member on its board since 2019, the shareholder resolution said. "Considering the size and complexity of the operations of the company and the evolving global and local regulatory landscape particularly in consumer and technology businesses, (it was) thought fit that induction of a vastly experienced senior legal professional as a member of the Board of Directors of the company would be in the interest of the company."

—PTI

NEAR HATTA GAS FIELD

ONGC inks deal with IOC for LNG plant in MP

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

State-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) have formalised a partnership to set up a state-of-the-art small-scale Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant near the Hatta Gas Field in the Vindhyan Basin, Madhya Pradesh.

The Hatta LNG plant is poised to transform the energy dynamics of the Vindhyan Basin, elevating it from a Category II to a Category I Basin, indicative of its enhanced resource potential and economic importance, ONGC said.

Utilizing cutting-edge technology, the Hatta LNG plant will produce LNG, which is recognized as a cleaner alternative to traditional fossil fuels.

The adoption of LNG is a crucial step in reducing carbon emissions, contributing substantially to India's climate change mitigation efforts and commitment to a greener future.

The discovery at the Hatta Gas Field is the result of five decades of relentless exploration efforts by ONGC.

ONGC and Indian Oil signed a MoU to establish a LNG plant *PHOTO: X/@ONGC*

In alignment with this discovery, ONGC has submitted its Field Development Plan (FDP) to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), aiming to monetize the gas assets in the Hatta region effectively.

The non-binding MoU between ONGC and IOCL signed on 17 Junefor the establishment of a technology demonstration small-scale LNG plant at Hatta symbolizes a forward-looking approach to energy production.

The partnership between ONGC and IOCL stands as a testament to their shared commitment to a future where energy production is balanced with environmental stewardship.

ONGC in a statement said that this initiative is not just about energy production but is also a significant leap towards achieving the national objective of reducing carbon footprints and ensuring a sustainable future.

The establishment of the LNG plant near the Hatta Gas Field is a strategic move that aligns with India's broader goals of energy security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. *—ANI*

Prestige Estates plans to raise ₹5,000 crore via QIP

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Realty firm Prestige Estates Projects Ltd plans to raise up to Rs 5,000 crore by selling equity shares to institutional investors and also monetise its hotel business through issuance of shares of its arm Prestige Hospitality Ventures.

Prestige Estates is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It is into development of housing, office, shopping malls, warehousing and hospitality projects. The company has a significant presence in South India and has entered into Mumbai and Delhi-NCR property market.

According to a regulatory filing on Friday, the company's board approved "raising of funds by way of issuance of equity shares or other eligible securities for an aggregate amount not exceeding Rs 5,000 crore by way of qualified institutional placement (QIP) or other permissible mode."The board also approved plans to "monetise assets of the hospitality segment through its arm Prestige Hospitality Ventures Ltd, by way of issue of shares (through primary or secondary or both)."*—PTI*

'M'rashtra must improve logistics, power supply for growth'

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 22 JUNE

Logistics infrastructure and cost of power supply have scope of improvement in Maharashtra for industrial growth, CII Vice President R Mukundan said on Saturday.

Mukundan inaugurated the new office of CII Marathwada Zone chaired by Sunil Kirdak.

"Last-mile connectivity is important for every industry to run their business smoothly. Improvement in logistics in terms of national and state highways should take place to keep investments coming. Where industry is less, we need more connectivity there," he told reporters.

CII Vice President R Mukundan said efforts should be made to make the western region more competitive in terms of power supply and cost of power *PHOTO: PTI*

Efforts should be made to make the western region more competitive in terms of power supply and cost of power. There is a need to reduce the cost of power, he added.

These two issues have been addressed well but there is a scope of improvement, Mukundan noted.

On prospects of exports, he said, "If we need to export from here, we have to increase the number of airports and port facilities also".

CII western region deputy chairman Rishi Kumar Bagla said, some airlines have shown interest to run international flights from here. Work is also underway in the international convention centre here.

Chikalthana and Shirdi airports are connecting the region to the South, North and West of the country.

Talking about the local issues, Sunil Kirdak said, "We have met the police commissioner here and have put forth some issues. The police have acted on it and regular meetings are expected to happen." *—PTI*

77% DROP IN FUNDING

'Indian deeptech startups count surges'

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

India saw a significant surge in deeptech startups in 2023 with 480 new ventures emerging, making it the third largest pool globally, a report said. However, the report by technology industry body nasscom and global consulting firm Zinnov highlighted the worrying trend of a funding winter, posing a major challenge for these startups.

'India's DeepTech Dawn: Forging Ahead' report also said funding for scaling, talent attraction and retention, and global expansion are the top three challenges faced by startups in deeptech innovation.

"India currently has 3600+ deeptech startups, out of which 480 were established in 2023 itself, nearly 2X more than the number of deeptech startups established in 2022," the report said.

But India's deeptech promise is stunted by a funding gap.

"Compared to startups across some other leading deeptech ecosystems, Indian deeptech startups receive a fraction of the median investment at every stage. This lack of funding restricts the ability of some promising deeptech startups to scale, thus hindering India's ability to compete in the global deeptech race," it said.

The absence of global investors, who had previously driven funding, also contributed significantly to this decline *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Indian deeptech startups raised about USD 10 billion in the last five years.

Total USD 850 million was raised in 2023 itself -- this is a 77 per cent decline over USD 3.7 billion raised in 2022. The number of deals, meanwhile, declined by 25 per cent in 2023 over 2022, it said.

"India needs a multi-pronged approach: increased funding at early-stage, supportive market ecosystem for scale-ups, and robust initiatives to aid commercialisation."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerged as a founder's favourite, with 74 per cent of deeptech startups established in 2023 driven by AI. AI was also an investor favourite, with 86 per cent of the startups who raised funding in 2023 having an AI focus.

AI takes the center stage in patent filings with 41 per cent of all patent filings in deeptech, followed, with a large gap, by IoT and Neurotech, the report said.

According to venture capital firms, long gestation periods are the biggest challenge facing them while investing in deeptech.

"Co-investment programmes and government-backed instruments are necessary initiatives to be taken by the government to make the landscape more favourable to invest in," the report said.

The number of investors participating in funding rounds for India's deeptech startups dropped by over 60 per cent in 2023 compared to 2022.

The absence of many large global investors, who had previously driven funding, also contributed significantly to this decline. *—PTI*

Durlax top surface IPO booked 161 times on day 3

NEW DELHI, 22 JUNE

Solid surface manufacturer Durlax Top Surface's Rs 40.80 crore initial public offer has been oversubscribed nearly 161 times, the company said on Saturday.

According to the exchange data, the IPO received bids for around 87 crore shares against 60 lakh shares on offer for subscription, Durlax Top Surface said in a statement.Non-institutional investor category received the highest interest among investors and was subscribed over 415 times. Bids for around 35.52 crore shares were received against 8.56 lakh shares on offer.

Retail segment was subscribed over 202 times and the qualified investor segment was subscribed over 48 times, the company said. The company's shares will be listed on the NSE SME platform, Emerge, on 26 June.The company had fixed the price band at Rs 65-68 per share for the issue which was open for subscription from 19-21 June, it added.The IPO comprises a fresh issue of 42 lakh shares worth up to Rs 28.56 crore and an offer for sale of 18 lakh shares worth up to Rs 12.24 crore.

Out of the fresh issue of Rs 28.56 crore, the company plans to utilise Rs 17.50 crore to part finance working capital requirements and Rs 6 crore towards general corporate purposes.Promoters including Shravan Suthar and Lalit Suthar hold around 95 per cent stake in the company while public shareholders hold nearly 5 per cent stake.

Promoter Shravan Kumar, who held 66.94 per cent of the equity stake or 83,01,399 shares sold 18 lakh shares through the OFS route.

The Gujarat-based company reported revenue of Rs 90.84 crore and a net profit of Rs 5.05 crore for FY 2023-24. *—PTI*

DURLAX TOP SURFACE LIMITED

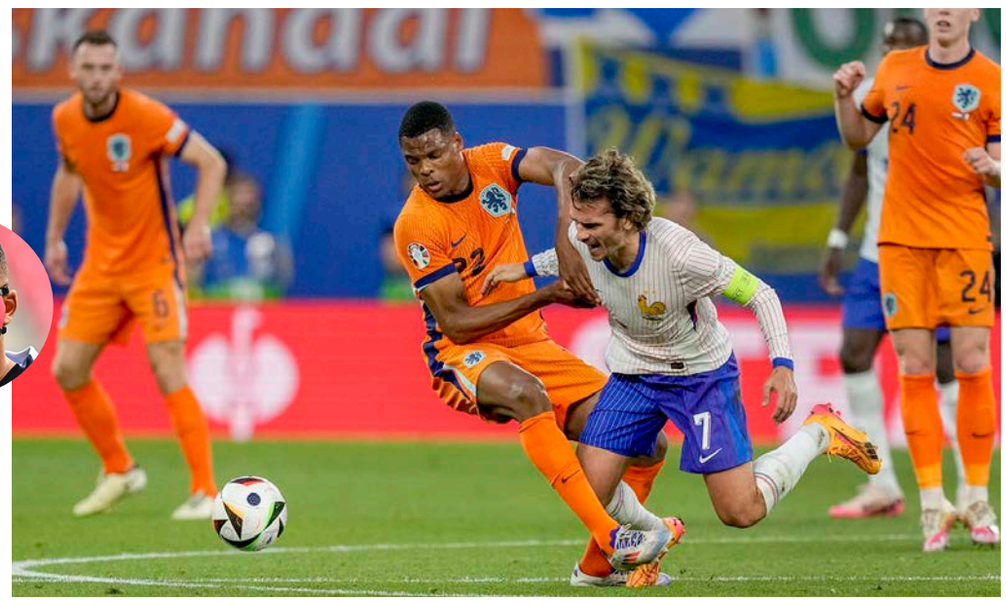
- According to the exchange data, the IPO received bids for around 87 crore shares against 60 lakh shares on offer for subscription, Durlax Top Surface said in a statement.Non-institutional investor category received the highest interest and was subscribed 415 times

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

France's Mbappé sits out draw with Netherlands

Mbappé is yet to score in European Championship

LEIPZIG, 22 JUNE



Denzel Dumfries of the Netherlands and Antoine Griezmann of France make a run for the ball during a Group D match at Euro 2024 in Leipzig. (Inset) A masked up Kylian Mbappé **PHOTO: X / @EURO2024**

Kylian Mbappé remained on the substitutes' bench for the full 90 minutes as France were held to a 0-0 draw by the Netherlands at Euro 2024 on Friday, days after breaking his nose in the team's first game of the tournament.

Mbappé, 25, collided with Austria's Kevin Danso in the second half of Monday's 1-0 win for France. France's federation confirmed Mbappé wouldn't need surgery, though he is set to wear a mask for the remainder of the tournament, and whether he would participate against the Netherlands in any capacity was in question.

Mbappé is yet to score in European Championship football in five attempts.

Aurélien Tchouaméni was named in the midfield to replace Mbappé as the only change for Didier Deschamps' France side in a rejigged lineup. Antoine Griezmann moved forward into an attacking trio alongside Ousmane Dembélé, and Marcus Thuram.

Despite France failing to find the net, Deschamps opted to leave Mbappé on the bench ahead of France's final game of the group stage, against Poland on Tuesday.

France and the Netherlands are level on four points at the top of the group standings, with Austria on three, while Poland has no points and cannot advance. Mbappé trained wearing a mask adorning the colors of the French flag on Thursday, and Didier Deschamps said: "Everything is going well, after the shock we had." The rules of European football's governing body UEFA mean Mbappé will only be allowed to wear a single-colour mask should Deschamps choose to bring him on. Ronald Koeman, the Netherlands manager, said in his news conference Thursday that his team was prepared to face a quality opponent regardless of the new Real Madrid man's fitness.

"France is such a strong team that even if Mbappé is not playing, the substitute will be a great player as well," Koeman said.

"Not everything depends on whether Mbappé is there or not. We know that he can be a game-changer. He had a big influence on the last two games, two qualification games, but it doesn't depend on us." France and the Netherlands are level on three points in Group D. The Dutch came from behind to beat Poland 2-1, and France needed an own goal to beat Austria.

France have won seven of the teams' past eight meetings, including home and away victories in qualifying.

—AP

Schick becomes all-time top scorer for the Czechs

LEIPZIG, 22 JUNE

Georgia earned its first-ever point at a major tournament in a 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic at Euro 2024 on Saturday.

Euro 2020's joint-top scorer Patrik Schick got one back for Czechia in the 59th minute after pushing the ball into the net with his body, after it rebounded off the left post following a corner.

Schick has now overtaken Milan Baroš as Czechia's all-time top goalscorer in the history of the European Championships.

Georges Mikautadze became the first player to score in his country's first two matches at the Euros since Gareth Bale in 2016, after scoring the penalty against Czechia on Saturday.

He scored in Georgia's 3-1 loss to Turkey in Georgia's first-ever match in the European Championship.

—AP

Czech Republic's Patrik Schick celebrates **PHOTO: PHOTO: X / @EURO2024**

India women's team **PHOTO: PTI**

India women eye ODI series clean sweep against SA

BENGALURU, 22 JUNE

India was able to tame varied challenges thrown at them by South Africa so far, and they will be eager to take the series to its fitting conclusion of a 3-0 margin during the third and final ODI here on Sunday.

Currently, the margin stands 2-0 in favor of India but that insuperable position has not come without its trials by fire.

In the first match, the Indian batters had to come back from a perilous 99 for five before making a 260-plus total. The home-side bowlers defended the target well too.

But in the second game, it was the turn of the Indian bowlers to ace the test that they were subjected to by centurions Laura Wolvaardt and Marizanne Kapp on a placid pitch.

Despite the heavy pounding, they kept their nerves till the last ball of the match to come out on the right side of the result.

However, the common thread across these two matches was the exceptional batting of Smriti Mandhana, who made 117 and 136 in them.

Mandhana thus became the first Indian woman batter to score two successive hundreds in ODIs, and she also equaled Mithali Raj's record of seven one-day centuries.

So, the Indian vice-captain will be eager to sign off from the ODI series on a high before entering the one-off Test at Chennai on June 28.

The timely return to form of skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who made an 88-ball 103 in the second match, too might have pleased the management no end.

However, the think tank will be eager to see a substantial outing from opener Shafali Verma, whose run of low scores has now been extended to eight matches.

India vs South Africa match starts at 1.30 PM

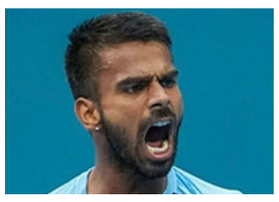


PHOTO: PTI

Nagal confirms his Paris Olympics qualification

CHENNAI, 22 JUNE

Indian tennis star Sumit Nagal on Saturday confirmed that he has officially qualified for the men's singles event of the upcoming Paris Olympics. The Paris Games will be his second stint in the Olympics, having also qualified for the 2020 Tokyo Games, where he made it to the second round. "Extremely glad to share that I have officially qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics. *—PTI*

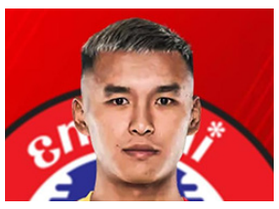


PHOTO: PTI

Mark Zothanpuia joins East Bengal FC on a 3-year deal

KOLKATA, 22 JUNE

East Bengal FC on Saturday announced the signing of promising India U-23 player Mark Zothanpuia on a three-year contract that will run until the end of the 2026-27 season. Zothanpuia is a versatile footballer who can play in both midfield and defence. Welcoming Zothanpuia to the East Bengal FC family, Vibhash Vardhan Agarwal of Emami Group said, "Mark is one of the most versatile young players in India and is a valuable addition to our squad. *—PTI*

Pandya's fifty drives India to strong 196/5

NORTH SOUN, 22 JUNE

Star batter Virat Kohli found much-needed rhythm before Shivam Dube and Hardik Pandya, who made a forceful unbeaten fifty, pushed India to 196 for five against Bangladesh in their T20 World Cup Super 8s match here on Saturday. Struggling for runs since his selection in the India squad, Dube (34 off 24) once again was slow off the blocks before smoking three sixes to make an impact towards the end of the innings.*—PTI*

SUPER RUGBY

Blues captain Patrick Tuipulotu, centre, holds the trophy as the Blues team celebrates winning the Super Rugby Pacific final against the Chiefs in Auckland **PHOTO: PTI**

Sinner reaches first grass-court final in Halle

HALLE , 22 JUNE

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner reached his first grass-court final by beating Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 7-6 (3) at the Halle Open on Saturday to set up a title match against Hubert Hurkacz.

The Italian Sinner saved a set point in the second set before jumping out to a quick lead in the tiebreaker. The Australian Open champion improved his record to 37-3 this year.

The Italian reached the Wimbledon semifinals last year, losing in straight sets to Novak Djokovic.

Hurkacz had fired 17 aces in his 7-6 (2), 6-4 victory over second-seeded Alexander Zverev. The fifth-seeded Polish player saved all four break points he faced. It was his first victory over Zverev, ranked No. 4, in four tries.

Hurkacz, ranked No. 9, won Halle in 2022, his only other final on grass. *—AP*

Jannik Sinner **PHOTO: @JANNIKSIN**

T20 WORLD CUP

Hope blasts 82 not out as West Indies crush USA by 9 wickets

BRIDGETOWN, 22 JUNE

Opener Shai Hope blasted an unbeaten 82 as West Indies came back roaring to crush the United States of America by nine wickets in the T20 World Cup Group 2 Super Eight match here.

After bowling out the USA for a mere 128 in 19.5 overs, the West Indies batters went all guns blazing from the word go to knock off the target in 10.5 overs to make 130/1, recording a comfortable win.

The win improved West Indies' standing in the Group 2 points table. The Caribbean side, which had suffered an eight-wicket hammering from England on Wednesday, is now placed second with two points and a Net Run Rate of 1.814. West Indies skipper Rovman Powell lauded Hope for showing his mettle after being dropped for the contest against England.

"He's been fantastic, he got a chance against Afghanistan but was dropped next game against England in St Lucia because of the combination. However, he was hungry for a good performance," Powell said. "It's (the win is) very special, Kensington brings back special memories for us. We had a great opportunity to come out and play some good cricket. Johnson Charles fell for a 14-ball 15 with a couple of fours early on but the pair of Hope (82 not out) and Nicholas Pooran did the job for their side, smacking the USA bowlers all around the park here at the Kensington Oval. West Indies 130 for 1 (82*) beat United States of America 128 (Gous 29, Chase 3-19, Russell 3-31) by nine wickets.

—PTI

West Indies Shai Hope hits a six during the men's T20 World Cup cricket match between the USA **PHOTO: X / @T20WORLDCUP**

England eyes massive win over USA

BRIDGETOWN, 22 JUNE

Defending champions England will need their power hitters to do the job against a demoralized yet tricky USA in their final Super 8 match as they eye a huge win to keep themselves in contention for a semifinal spot at the T20 World Cup here on Sunday. England batters couldn't produce the big hits while chasing a target of 164 during their last Super 8 match against South Africa, suffering a narrow seven-run loss on Friday. West Indies' massive nine-wicket win over the USA has opened up the group, leaving England with the task of notching up a big victory to push their net run rate up. **Eng vs USA match starts at 8 pm IST.** *—PTI*

Tennis: Bhosale clinches victory at ITF W35 Tauste

TAUSTE, 22 JUNE

Indian tennis star Rutuja Bhosale, in partnership with China's Fangran Tian, won the doubles competition in the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Women's 35,000 (ITF W35) tournament in Tauste in Spain on Saturday.

The formidable duo secured the title with a straight sets triumph over the third-seeded pair, Alana Parnaby of Australia and Victoria Rodriguez of Mexico, with a final score of 6-2, 6-4.

From the very first serve, they exerted their dominance, quickly taking control of the match and never allowing their opponents a chance to recover. Their decisive victory highlighted their ability to remain composed under pressure and execute strategic plays at critical moments.

This victory marks Bhosale's third doubles title of the year, adding to her impressive wins at the W50 Wuning and W75 Fukuoka tournaments. *—PTI*

Rutuja **PHOTO: @RUTUJABHOOSALE**

SELANGOR MASTERS GOLF

Gangjee holds on in a close finish to win

SELANGOR , 22 JUNE

Rahil Gangjee won the PKNS Selangor Masters despite six bogeys in his 3-over 73 on the final day as he prevailed over Deyen Lawson (69) by one shot, here Saturday.

The 45-year-old veteran, who had started the day with a five-shot lead, finished at 8-under for the wire-to-wire win as Lawson was 7-under.

Gangjee's five-shot lead going into the final round disappeared within a matter of holes as he could not find the form that he seemed to have had since round one.

With three bogeys in his first nine, and another to match on hole 10, he soon found himself neck and neck with Thailand's Runchanapong Youprayong.

It was Gangjee's second win on the ADT after his 2018 success at Louis Philippe Cup in India.

Shubhankar slips in third round of KLM Open

Shubhankar Sharma, heading to the Paris Olympics in August, cut the line in the second round of the KLM Open before suffering a round of 3-over 74 in the following round in Amsterdam.

Sharma is now tied for 67th. He had a double bogey in the second round and had two more in the third on the Par-3 fourth and Par-5 18th, which he had birdied on the opening two days. Overall, he had four birdies, three bogeys, and two doubles on the third day, down four places from the second round. The leader after two rounds was Mikko Korhonen (64-68), who was 10-under. He was yet to start his third round.

Rahil Gangjee and Shubhankar Sharma **PHOTO: PTI**

Jeev Milkha Singh and Aditi Ashok **PHOTO: PTI**

Jeev tied 7th and Randhawa T-13 in Legends golf in Ireland

Jeev Milkha Singh rode on a round of 4-under 68 to leap into tied-seventh place at the OFX Irish Legends Golf Championship. The tournament is a part of Legends Tour Europe. Jeev, who had four birdies against two bogeys and two double bogeys in his first round, was more comfortable in the second round.

He birdied twice on the front nine and three times on the back nine and had one bogey. His rounds of 74 and 68 now place him at 2-under and tied for seventh position.

Aditi Ashok cuts Women's PGA golf

Aditi Ashok managed to squeeze inside the cut line despite three bogeys in the second round of the KPMG Women's PGA Championship here. The Indian, who is playing a record 30th Major in women's golf, had five bogeys and no birdies in her round of 77 as she totaled 5-over 149 after a first round of even par 72 at Sahalee Country Club.

At 149 she is tied 64th and right on the cut line. Aditi, who will play her third Olympics in August this year in Paris, has two more rounds to make amends over the weekend. *—PTI*

Fire at McLaren hospitality suite

DUBAI, 22 JUNE

The McLaren team endured a scare at the Spanish Grand Prix on Saturday morning when what is believed to be an electrical fire broke out in their motorhome, causing it to be evacuated. The fire brigade was brought into the paddock to deal with it and it is understood several people were taken for treatment due to smoke inhalation.

An hour before the final practice session began in Barcelona, with the team's hospitality suite hosting guests, team members, and drivers, the fire broke out in the unit that has two floors, reportedly above the kitchen, which is located on the ground floor.

The lights went out and everyone was ushered out, including the British driver Lando Norris, and his Australian teammate, Oscar Piastri.

The fire brigade was summoned into the paddock, with personnel from other teams acting swiftly to clear the way for the emergency services. The firefighters entered the hub with hoses to deal with the fire, while ambulances also arrived, although it is believed there were no serious injuries.

—AP

An electrical fire broke out in their motorhome **PHOTO: X/@MCLAREN**